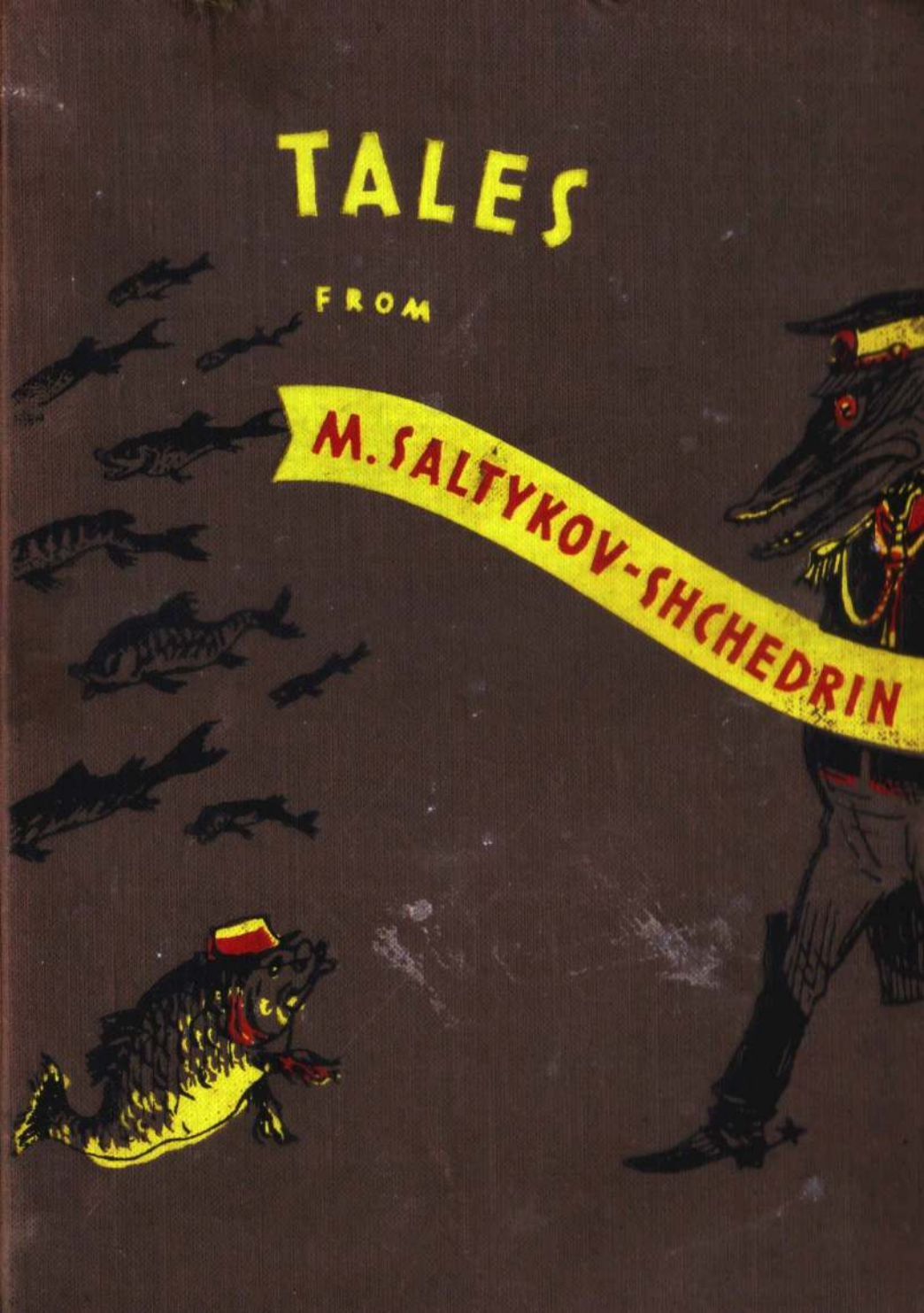
TALES

FROM

M. SALTYKOV-SHCHEDRIN



М. Е. САЛТЫКОВ-ЩЕДРИН

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

TALES
FROM
M. SALTYKOV-SHCHEDRIN

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HOW ONE PLAIN PEASANT FED TWO HIGH OFFICIALS

Once upon a time there lived two high officials, and so feather-brained were they that, hey presto!—they found themselves on a desert island.

Now, the two officials had served all their life in a certain registry. There they had been registered at birth, and there, too, they had grown to manhood and reached old age. And so it was quite natural that they did not understand a thing. All the words they knew were "Accept assurances . . ." and so on.

After a while, on the grounds of its uselessness, the registry was abolished, and our officials were discharged. They took up

their abode in Podyacheskaya Street in St. Petersburg, each in separate lodgings, with his own housekeeper and his pension. But then, as we have said, they suddenly found themselves on a desert island. They woke up in the morning and to their astonishment they found themselves lying side by side under the same blanket. Of course, they could not make head or tail of it at first, just talked away as if nothing had happened.

"Bless my soul, Your Excellency, I've had such a strange dream! I dreamt I was stranded on a desert island."

The words were barely out of his mouth when up he jumped, followed post-haste by his companion.

"Goodness! What on earth has happened? Where are we?" they gasped in horror.

And they both felt each other to make sure that they weren't dreaming.

But try as they might to believe that it was nothing more than a dream, they were forced to accept the hard facts as they were. On the one hand, the sea rolled before them; on the other, a tiny bit of land with the same boundless sea extending beyond. And now, for the first time since leaving the registry, our two officials burst into tears. They began to look each other over: they were both in night-shirts, and each had an Order dangling from his neck.

"What wouldn't I give for a cup of coffee," sighed one of them, but immediately recalled the terrible thing that had happened to them and burst out sobbing again.

"What on earth shall we do?" he exclaimed through his tears. "To write a report now would hardly do any good."

"Do you know what," said the other, "you, Your Excellency, go east, and I'll go west, and let's both meet here in the evening. Maybe we shall hit on something."

For a long time they were busy trying to find east and west. But all in vain. At last one of them remembered their Chief once saying that if you wanted to find east, you should face north and you'd find it on your right. So they started to

search for the north. This way they turned and that, trying all the points of the compass, but, having spent their lives in a registry, they just couldn't find anything.

"Look here, Your Excellency, you go to the right, I'll go to the left. It will be better that way!" said the other official, who besides serving at the registry had once taught calligraphy at a school for soldiers' orphans, and because of this had a bit more sense.

No sooner said than done. One went to the right and saw tall trees with all kinds of fruit. The official longed to taste one of the apples. But they were so high that he could not reach them from the ground. He attempted to climb a tree, but the only result was a torn night-shirt. Then he came to a stream and found it teeming with fish, just like the fish-pond on the Fontanka. "Ah, if only I had fish like that in my rooms at Podyacheskaya!" So he thought, and his mouth watered at the sight.

He walked on until he came to a wood, and there he saw the whistling hazel grouse, the mating woodcook and rabbits scampering among the trees.

"My goodness! What an abundance of food!" he muttered, in the agony of hunger, but willy-nilly, he had to go back empty-nanded. The other high official was waiting for him.

"Well, Your Excellency, any luck?"

"No, none at all. The only thing I found was an old copy of *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*!"*

However it was, the officials lay down again, but hunger drove sleep away. Troubles of all kinds filled their minds. Who, they wondered, would draw their pensions for them, or they would recall the fruit, fish and fowl they had seen during the day.

"Who would have thought, Your Excellency, that man's

* *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*—a newspaper published in Moscow (1756). —*Ed.*

daily food in its original state flies in the air, swims in water and grows on trees?" one of them wondered aloud.

"Yes," responded the other, "I must confess, I always thought that rolls are born just as they appear on the breakfast table."

"It seems, therefore, that if one wants partridge for dinner one must first trap, then kill and pluck it, and then have it roasted. But how the deuce does one do all that?"

"Exactly, how is it all done?" echoed the other.

They fell silent and tried to sleep, but hunger made it useless. Visions of partridge, turkey and sucking pig fairly danced before their eyes—juicy, nicely browned, with cucumbers, pickles and salad.

"I believe I could eat my own boot now," said one high official.

"Yes, gloves aren't bad, either, especially if well-worn."

Suddenly the two glared at each other. An evil light gleamed in their eyes, they gnashed their teeth and deep growls came from their throats. Slowly they crept towards each other, and in a moment tore at each other in a rage. Shreds of clothing flew in all directions, and never was there such howling and snarling. The official who had taught calligraphy bit off and swallowed his colleague's Order. But the sight of blood had a sobering effect on them.

"Good heavens!" they exclaimed in one breath. "If we go on like that, we'll eat each other!"

"Ah me, however did we get here? I'd like to know what scoundrel has played this trick on us?"

"Your Excellency," suggested one of the officials, "I feel we ought to divert ourselves by conversation, otherwise there'll be murder here."

"You begin," replied the other.

"Well, for instance, why, in your view, does the sun first rise and then set, and not the other way round?"

"How odd you are, Your Excellency! Don't you also first rise, then walk to the office and then only go to bed?"

"But why not reverse the order? Why not go to bed first, dream all sorts of dreams and then get up?"

"H'm... yes... er.... But I must confess that when I served at the registry I always thought of it in this way: now it's morning, then it'll be day and afterwards they'll serve dinner and I'll go to bed!"

The reference to dinner, however, cast a gloom over them and broke the conversation at the very outset.

It was resumed by one of them saying: "I once heard a doctor say that a man can live on his own juices for a long time."

"How is that?"

"Well, it's something like this. Your own juices are believed to produce other juices, and those, in their turn, produce still others. And so on till all the juices end."

"And what then?"

"Then you must take food."

"D—!"

In short, no matter what the subject was it always brought memories of food, and that whetted their appetite more and more. They resolved to give up talking, and recalling the copy of the *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*, eagerly began to read it.

"Yesterday," one of them read in a tremulous voice, "His Honour the Governor of our ancient metropolis gave an official dinner. The table was laid for one hundred guests with a luxury that baffles description. The dainties of all countries seemed to have had a rendezvous at this magnificent feast: the golden sterlet of the Sheksna was seen alongside the pheasant of the Caucasian forests, and strawberries of a delicacy seldom seen in our northern climes in this grim month of February."

"For goodness' sake, Your Excellency, can't you find another subject?" cried the other in desperation, and, snatching the paper from his comrade, read the following:

"Our special correspondent writes from Tula: yesterday evening, to celebrate the hooking of a sturgeon in the River Upa (an event beyond the memory even of the oldest resident, especially since the sturgeon was identified as police inspector B.), the local club held a fête. The hero of the day was borne in on a huge wooden platter, encircled by cucumbers and with a sprig of lettuce in its mouth. Doctor P., as master of ceremonies, took special care that everyone should receive his share. The sauces were of such a variety as to suit almost every taste."

"Excuse me, Your Excellency, but you're not very careful either in your choice of subjects," broke in the first high official, and taking the paper in his turn, began to read:

"Your Vyatka correspondent reports that one of the oldest local residents has evolved the following original recipe for making fish soup. Take a live turbot, first whip it soundly, and when its liver is sufficiently enlarged with distress...."

The two high officials hung their heads. Everything they cast their eyes on was associated with food. Their very thoughts, as it were, conspired against them, for try as they would to exorcize the vision of beefsteak, the image made its way into their minds by sheer force.

But suddenly the high official who had taught calligraphy got an idea.

"I say, Your Excellency," he exclaimed joyfully, "what if we could find a muzhik?"

"A muzhik? What do you mean?"

"Why, sir, just an ordinary muzhik, the sort you meet anywhere. He could get us rolls and catch fish and grouse in no time!"

"H'm... a muzhik.... But where is he to be had? There are none about."

"How can you say that, Your Excellency? There are plenty of muzhiks everywhere. You've only to search well. I'm sure

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he's lolling about somewhere this very moment, trying to dodge work."

The thought was so comforting to the high officials that they jumped up and set off in search of a muzhik.

For a long time they roamed the island without success. But at last the pungent smell of chaffy bread and ill-cured sheepskin set them on the right trail. And there, sleeping under a tree, with his belly upwards and his fist beneath his head, they found a huge, hulking muzhik, quite obviously and audaciously shirking work. Their indignation knew no bounds.

"What, sleeping, you lazybones?" they fell upon him. "Here are two officials starving to death, and he won't lift a finger! Off with you to work this minute!" The muzhik rose to his feet and saw that this was no joking matter. These were very stern officials. At first he wanted to show them his heels, but they pounced on him and held on like grim death. After that he got busy.

First he climbed up an apple-tree, plucked a dozen of the ripest apples for the officials, and took a sour one for himself. Then he dug in the earth and produced a few potatoes. After that he rubbed two pieces of wood together and obtained fire. Then of his own hair he made a net and caught a grouse. Finally, he kindled a fire and cooked such a variety of good things that it even occurred to the officials that they might spare a morsel for the lazy lout, too.

They looked on at the peasant's labours, and their officials' hearts became light and gay. They had already forgotten that they had nearly died of starvation the day before; their only thought now was "Ah, how wonderful to be a high official—you will never perish anywhere."

"Are you satisfied, Your Excellencies?" asked the lazybones meanwhile.

"Very much so indeed, good fellow, we can see that you are doing your best."

"Do you mind if I rest for a bit?"

"Yes, you may, only make us a rope first."

In a trice the muzhik collected some wild hemp, soaked it in water, beat it and trampled on it, and by evening the rope was ready. With this same rope the officials trussed the muzhik to a tree so that he shouldn't run away, while they lay down to sleep.

A day passed, and another, and the muzhik became such an adept that he could even cook broth in his cupped palm. The two officials were blithe and merry and became so nice and plump that it was good to look at them. "It's not so bad here, after all," they would say. "Here we are, we have all we want, and at home in St. Petersburg our pensions are piling up into a tidy sum."

"What do you think, Your Excellency, is the legend of the Tower of Babel true, or is it just a myth?" one would say to the other after breakfast.

"I believe it must be true, Your Excellency, otherwise how will you explain the existence of different languages?"

"Then the Flood must have really taken place, too?"

"Certainly, for how is one to account for the antediluvians? And all the more so because the *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* says...."

"What about a peep at it right now?"

Accordingly, they would hunt up a copy, sit in the shade and read it from cover to cover—all about the way people feasted in Moscow, in Tula, in Penza, in Ryazan,—and they didn't feel the least bit sick!

* * *

The long and the short of it was that after a while the officials got homesick. Ever and again they would think of the cooks they had left in St. Petersburg and even cry a little on the quiet.

"I wonder what they are doing now at Podyacheskaya?" one would say.

"Don't speak about it, Your Excellency! It hurts to think about it," replied his companion.

"It's pretty nice here, but still, you know, it's not quite proper, a ram staying away from his ewe. And it's really distressing to think of those uniforms!"

"Yes, especially the fourth class ones;* to look at the braiding alone is enough to make you cry!"

So they set upon the muzhik to take them home to the Podyacheskaya. And believe it or not, he had been there himself, and drunk beer there (but it only trickled down his beard).

"Really?" exclaimed the two high officials. "Why, we, too, come from those parts."

"Well then, if you ever saw a man painting the wall, hung up in a cradle from the roof, or crawling on the house-top like a fly, that was me." Then the muzhik cudgelled his brains for words with which to thank his officials for their kindness, for deigning to accept a poor man's service. And he built them a ship—it wasn't really a ship, perhaps, but it was good enough to take them across the sea all the way to their blessed Podyacheskaya.

"Look out, you rascal, see you don't drown us!"

"Don't worry, Your Excellencies, I've done this kind of thing before," replied the muzhik and commenced preparations for sailing.

He gathered a pile of swan's down and lined the bottom of the boat with it. Having done so, he put the officials on board and, invoking God's blessing, set sail. And oh, the scares they had during the storms and the gales; the times they scolded the muzhik for his laziness—no tongue can tell nor pen

* According to pre-revolutionary classification, civil and military ranks were divided into 14 classes.—*Ed.*

describe. But he just kept rowing on, feeding the high officials with herrings.

But at last the dear old Neva hove in sight, and with it the good old Yekaterininsky Canal and their own beloved Podyacheskaya. The cooks just stared when they saw how soft, plump and merry their high officials had become. The high officials had a cup of coffee, ate white rolls and put on their uniforms. Then they set out for the treasury. And the heaps of money that had gathered no tale can tell nor pen describe.

But don't go thinking that they forgot the muzhik; they sent him a thimbleful of vodka and a silver coin: there, muzhik, go and enjoy yourself!

THE WILD GENTLEMAN

In a certain part of a certain kingdom there was a gentleman whose life was nothing but pleasure and contentment. He had plenty of everything on his estate: peasants, grain, cattle, land and orchards. He was thoroughly stupid; however, he read the newspaper *Vest*,* and his body was soft, white and plump.

And yet, one fine morning, the gentleman sent up a prayer to God: "Gracious Lord, you have given me all that man could wish. I am happy and contented! Only one thing still tortures my heart: there are far too many peasants in this kingdom!"

But the Almighty knew what a stupid man he was and left his petition ungranted.

* *Vest*—reactionary newspaper, mouthpiece of landed aristocracy published in St. Petersburg (1868-1870).—*Ed.*

The gentleman saw that the number of peasants was not getting less, but increasing daily. And seeing this, he began to fear: what if they should eat him out of his estate?

He looked into his copy of the *Vest* for guidance in such cases, but all he found there was: "Do your best!"

"Three words, but what words!" thought the stupid gentleman.

And he did his best, to be sure. He didn't go about things any old how, but established strict rules. If a peasant's fowl strayed into his cornfield, according to rule, it would promptly find itself in His Honour's soup. If a peasant went out after dark to cut faggots in his wood, in a trice those faggots would land in His Honour's wood-pile, and the culprit, according to another good rule, would be fined.

"It's fines that I mostly do them with," he explained to his neighbours. "Fines are what they understand."

Well, the peasants soon felt that although His Honour was stupid, he was too shrewd for *them*. They soon found themselves in such straits that nobody could show his nose without breaking a rule. This was forbidden them, that not permitted, or was not theirs, and so it was no matter where you turned. If their cattle drank from the river, he would roar: "It's my water"; if a chicken strayed in, he roared: "My land!" Air, water, land—all were his. And so hard pressed were the peasants that they hadn't a stick to light their huts, nor a willow twig to sweep the floor. So at last they all got together and sent up a prayer to God:

"Dear Lord! Better that we and our children should perish than suffer like this all our lives!"

And the merciful God lent ear to the bitter prayers of his orphans, and soon not a peasant remained on the stupid gentleman's land. Where they had gone no one knew. A whirlwind of chaff and a great black tornado of homespun breeches had swept past—that was all. His Honour stepped out on to his balcony, sniffed, and lo! on the whole of his estate the air was

as pure as pure can be. Naturally, he was very pleased. "Now," thought he, "I'll have all the comfort I need for my white, soft body."

So he began his new life and first of all thought of a way to kill time and amuse himself.

"Supposing I set up a theatre on the estate? Yes, I think I shall write to the actor Sadovsky.* Something like 'Come and see me, old man, and bring the girls along, too!' "

So the gentleman wrote and the actor Sadovsky duly accepted the invitation. He brought his girls along, too. But when he came he saw that the house was bare—no one to put up the scenes, no one to lower the curtain.

"What on earth have you done with your peasants?" Sadovsky asked the gentleman.

"Ah, that? The Lord God heard my prayer and rid my estate of these creatures."

"Well, you *are* a stupid gentleman, I must say. Who brings you water to wash your face?"

"Why, heaven knows when I last washed!"

"You want to grow mushrooms on your face, I suppose," said Sadovsky, and with no more ado he drove off home together with his actresses.

His Honour then recalled the four ex-generals who lived nearby. "Why," he thought, "why should I sit alone playing patience? Let me play a rubber or two with the generals!"

So he wrote out the invitations, fixed the day and mailed the letters. The generals, although they were real ones, were hungry, so they came over very soon. Upon arriving they were greatly astonished to find the air in His Honour's estate so pure.

"Ah," His Honour boasted, "that's because the Lord God answered my prayers and rid my estate of all the peasants."

"How delightful!" murmured the generals. "Then you won't have the least smell of bumpkins any more?"

* Sadovsky, Prov Mikhailovich (1818-1872), a famous Russian actor. —*Ed.*

"Not a whiff," replied His Honour.

Well, they played one game, and they played another, until the generals thought it was time for a drink. They grew restless and looked around with hungry eyes.

"I daresay you would like some refreshment?" asked the host.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea!"

He got up from the table, went to the cupboard and returned with five sweets and five biscuits—one for each.

"What is this?" asked the generals staring.

"Help yourselves, sirs."

"What nonsense! We want beef!"

"I'm very sorry, I haven't any to offer you. Since God rid my land of the bumpkins the kitchen stove hasn't been lit even once."

The generals were so furious that they gnashed their teeth.

"But you surely have food for yourself," they yelled at him.

"Well, I have something raw occasionally, and I still have some biscuits left."

"What a fool you are!" exclaimed the generals, and leaving the rubber unfinished, stalked away, each to his own quarters.

Now, this was the second time that His Honour had been called a fool. He was thinking it over when his eyes fell upon the pack of cards. So he dismissed the matter and sat down to lay out patience. "We'll see who's right, Messrs. Liberals! I'll show you what real firmness can do!"

He sat playing patience (the game known as *the ladies' whim*) and, as he played, he thought: "If it comes out three times running, I'll carry on!" And as if on purpose, it came out every time he played. He had no more doubts left whatever.

"Well," he said, "since fortune herself points that way, I'm

staying firm to the end. Now then, enough of playing patience. Up, sir, and get busy." And he walked for a while up and down, now and again sitting down to rest. And all the time he walked he kept thinking. He thought of all the engines he would order in England: he'd have nothing but steam-engines throughout his estate, not even a whiff of those bumpkins. He'd plant a big orchard—here, right in front would be pears and plums; over there—peaches, and there, in the left-hand corner —walnuts. He'd peep out one day and there it would be, his fine orchard, planted out by magic in the very order he had planned. He'd gather the fruit by machinery and pop it straight into his mouth. He imagined the dairy herd he would raise, the oceans of milk it would yield, what wonderful strawberries he would plant—double size, all of them, five berries to a pound. And oh, the loads of strawberries he would sell in Moscow!

But at length, getting tired of thinking, he would go to the mirror to look at his face. Goodness! the dust on it was an inch deep! "Senka!" he would call, forgetting himself for a minute. But then he would remember and hang his head. "All right," he would say, "let it stay there for the time. I've said that I'll show those Liberals what firmness of spirit can do, and I will!"

He would dawdle like that till evening and then go to bed. And while he slept he would have even pleasanter dreams than by day. He dreamed that the Governor himself had heard of his adamant firmness and asked the chief of police who was this wonderful fellow he'd heard of.

Or else he imagined they'd given him a seat in the government as a reward for his firmness; he walked about glittering with medals and sent out stern circulars everywhere: "Firmness and firmness again!"

Or again, he would dream that he was in Eden, strolling along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, whispering compliments to Eve....

In the morning, however, all the dreams would vanish and he got up and shouted: "Senka!" but then, remembering, he would hang his head again.

"What can I do to kill time?" he wondered one morning. "I wish to goodness somebody would come in to see me." And the words were hardly out of his mouth when the chief of police came in person. The joy of the stupid gentleman was indescribable. He ran to the cupboard and fished out two biscuits. "Well, this one should be satisfied," he thought.

The chief of police made his entrance. "Would you mind explaining, sir, the miracle of the disappearance of your tenants?"

"Well, it's like this, sir. I prayed to God and he cleared all the bumpkins off my estate."

"So I see. But have you any notion, sir, who is to pay the taxes for them?"

"The taxes? Why, they... they themselves, of course! It's their duty and obligation."

"Well, sir, how are the taxes to be gathered when thanks to your prayer, your peasants are scattered all over the world?"

"Well... er... I don't exactly see how, but, of course, I'm not going to pay!"

"I believe that Your Honour knows that the treasury cannot exist without taxes, not to mention the salt and wine duties."

"Why, as to that, I'm quite willing! A glass of vodka, sir?"

"Just a moment, sir! Do you happen to know that thanks to Your Honour there isn't a pound of meat or an ounce of flour to be had on the market? Do you realize what that means?"

"Well, as regards myself, I'm ready to do all I can. Here are two biscuits."

"You *are* a stupid gentleman, I must say!" scoffed the chief of police, and turning round, he departed without even looking at the vodka and biscuits.

Now His Honour was really troubled. This was no joke. Three times he'd been called a fool. The third time a visitor had looked in, spat and departed. Maybe he was a fool? Could it be that this exalted firmness of spirit was just stupidity, nay, more—even madness? Was it true that his firmness had stopped the payment of taxes and made it impossible to find an ounce of flour or a pound of meat on the market?

At first, being a stupid gentleman, he just giggled at the idea. But then he recalled the words of the chief of police: "Do you realize what that means?"

He took to walking up and down as usual and fell into a funk. And all the while he was trying to guess what it *really* meant. Did it mean exile to Cheboksari, or some other hole? Well then, if so, let it be Cheboksari. "At any rate, the world would have the chance to applaud real firmness!" He said that aloud, but deep inside he was hoping: "Perhaps I shall find my dear peasants there!" He walked for a while, sat down, and then started walking again. Everything he set eyes on seemed to say: "Oh, but you *are* a stupid gentleman!" A mouse peeped out and scurried across the floor, towards the cards he'd been playing with. Indeed, they were greasy enough to excite her appetite.

"Shoo!" he cried, but the mouse was too clever: she knew very well that without his Senka His Honour was harmless. She just flicked her tail disdainfully and the next moment was peering out from under the sofa, as if to say: "Wait, you stupid gentleman! This isn't all! I'll nibble your dressing-gown, too, when you've greased it properly."

After a time the walks in his garden were covered with weeds, the bushes were alive with all manner of vermin, and the park re-echoed with the howls of wild animals. Once even a bear came up to the walls of the house, sat on its haunches, peered at His Honour through the window and licked its chops.

"Senka!" screamed the gentleman, but then he remembered everything and burst into tears.

But the firmness of his spirit remained unabated. At times, it is true, he did show symptoms of weakness, but as soon as he felt it coming he dashed to his paper—the *Vest*, and the next moment was adamant again.

"No, no! I'll grow wild and roam the woods with the other animals rather than have it said that Prince Urus-Kutchum-Kildibayev, the Russian nobleman, turned on his own principles."

And so the gentleman grew wild. Although it was autumn and pretty chilly, he did not feel the least bit cold. He grew hairy all over, like Esau, and his nails became hard as iron. He had long left off blowing his nose and for the most part walked on all fours. He was quite surprised that he had not thought of it before—this extremely becoming and convenient mode of locomotion. Soon he lost the faculty to articulate speech and adopted a kind of triumphant war-whoop, a cross between a whistle, hiss and growl. The one thing he had not acquired yet was a tail.

He would go prowling in the park, where formerly he had sunned his soft body—scramble, catlike, to the top of the highest tree and sit there in ambush. And if, say, a rabbit ventured to squat on its hind legs, straining its ears for danger—swoop—in a jiffy His Honour would be upon it. Swift as an arrow, he would pounce on his quarry, tear it to pieces with his nails and devour it, fur, entrails and all.

As time went on His Honour became tremendously strong, so strong that he felt fit to propose a friendly alliance to the self-same bear that had once frightened him by peering through the window.

"What would you say, Bruin, if we'd hunt hares together?"

"I don't see why not," replied the bear, "but really, you shouldn't have acted so with your peasants."

"Why not?"

"Well, the bumpkins were far better game than you gentlefolk. And I'll be frank with you, you *are* very stupid."

Meanwhile the chief of police, lenient though he was to the gentry, dared not hush up such a glaring fact as the disappearance of peasants from the face of the earth. Upon receiving his message the authorities likewise were very much concerned. They wrote to him, asking who would pay the taxes, drink vodka and indulge in similar innocent occupations? The chief of police replied that they might as well abolish the treasury altogether; as for the innocent occupations, they had abolished themselves and had been replaced by theft, highway robbery and murder, which crimes had spread all over the countryside. Things had reached such a pitch, in fact, that the other day he himself, the chief of police, had been waylaid by a creature, half-bear, half-human, who had all but murdered him. It was believed that the aforementioned monster was none other than the same stupid gentleman that had been the cause of all the commotion.

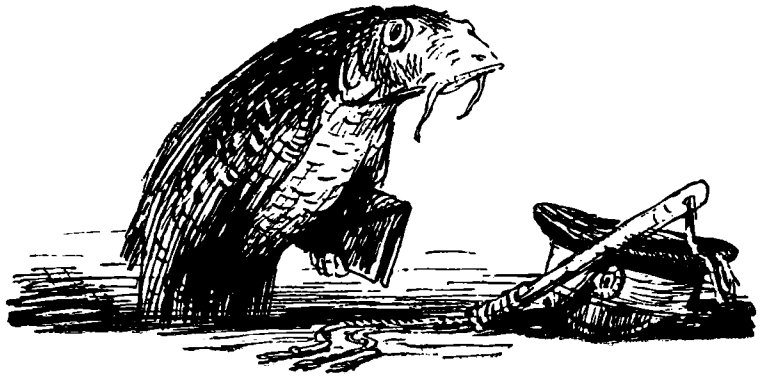
The authorities became alarmed and held counsel. They decided that the peasants should be caught and returned to their habitations, and the cause of the disturbance—i.e., the stupid gentleman, reprimanded in the politest terms, entreated to cease his escapades and requested not to obstruct the collection of government taxes.

At that time, as luck would have it, a swarm of peasants descended on the chief town of that province. They landed right in the middle of the market-place and filled the whole square. And at once this godsend was picked up, placed in a wicker basket and dispatched to the wild gentleman's estate.

Soon the whole neighbourhood again reeked with the smell of chaff and sheepskin. But for all that the market bins were bursting with flour, meat and food of all kinds. And in a single day so much tax-money was raised that the treasurer, seeing the mounds of rubles, could only shake his head and exclaim in bewilderment: "Where the devil do they get it, the bastards?"

But what became of the gentleman? the reader may ask. Well, after great effort he was caught at last, had his nose blown, his body thoroughly washed and his nails clipped. After that the chief of police admonished him accordingly, took away the newspaper *Vest*, and, leaving him to the supervision of Senka, departed.

His Honour is alive and well to this day, plays patience and sighs for the good old days when he roamed the forest. He washes only under compulsion and occasionally issues a growl.



THE SAPIENT MINNOW

Once upon a time there lived a Minnow. Now, this Minnow's parents were known for their sense; little by little, and bit by bit they had lived to a ripe old age and never got cooked for fish soup or snapped up by pike. And the same good luck they wished their son. "Take care, Sonny," Father Minnow told him on the day of his death, "if you want to enjoy life, keep both eyes open!"

Now young master Minnow had a fine store of wits as well. He used them, and wherever he turned, he saw it was checkmate for him. The water was full of big fishes, and he, the Minnow, was the tiniest of the lot. Any old bully of a fish could gobble him up, and he could not gobble anyone. "And why *should* one gobble up anyone?" he questioned. At any moment the lobster might snap him in two with his claw, or the water flea might cling to his back and harass him to death. And even his own brother-minnows, when they saw him catch a gnat, would rush up in shoals to take it away. They'd snatch

it right out of his mouth and then start fighting over it, till the gnat itself would be good-for-nothing.

And man—what an artful creature he was! What tricks he devised to murder the minnows, and for no good reason whatever! Draw nets and plain nets and creels, yes, and last but not least—the fishing line....

Now, could there be anything sillier than the fishing line? Just a plain strip of thread, with a hook at the end and a fly or worm stuck on for bait. The way they stuck it on, too—in the most unnatural posture imaginable. And yet it's mostly the fishing line that the minnows are caught with.

The old fish had warned him of the fishing line more than once. "Watch out for the line!" he would say. "Of course, it's the silliest of tackle, but we minnows are such folk, it's the silliest that's surest with us. They toss you a fly—to do you good, supposedly—and there—you catch your death in that fly."

The old minnow also told him how he'd nearly landed in fish soup. The men came fishing in a gang that day, spread the net right across the river, and dragged it over the bottom for almost two versts. Goodness, the heaps of fish they caught then! Pike, roach, dace, chub—all were there. Even the lazy bream were whisked up from the slimy bottom. As for minnows, there was simply no counting them. And oh, the fright his old father had as they dragged him along—no tongue can tell nor pen describe. He felt himself driven on, and he didn't know where or whither. On one side of him was a pike and on the other a perch. "Lord!" thought he, "a few steps more, and one or the other'll eat me, sure as I'm a minnow!" But they didn't even touch him. "It wasn't a time for eating. Oh no, it wasn't, my boy!" The only thought was: "It's all over with us!" But why, for what reason—nobody knew. At last they began drawing in the wings of that net. They hauled it ashore and dumped the fish on the grass. Then it was that Father Minnow got the idea of fish soup. A red-coloured something spluttered on the sand, grey clouds rose from it, and such heat,

he became faint and limp in a minute. It was bad enough being without water, but they kept on making it hotter and hotter. *Fire*, he heard them call it. And on that fire they placed something that was black, with the water in it raging as in a storm. That was a *pot*, he heard them say. "Chuck them in," they shouted, "and let's have *fish soup*!" And—plonkety-plonk!—they began to fling in the fish. Splash—the fish dived in, then jumped out like mad and again went under. And there it grew still—had a taste of fish soup, that is.

At first they didn't mind very much which fish they took, just plumped in one after another. But then an old fisherman looked at Father Minnow. "That nipper's no good for soup," he said, "let him grow up." He picked him by the gills and threw him into the free water. Father Minnow didn't hesitate, but swam home as fast as he could. Home he came, and there was his wife peering out for him, more dead than alive.

And would you believe it? Although he spared no pains in explaining what's what about fish soup, yet you'll hardly find a fish with a proper notion of fish soup to this day.

But young master Minnow remembered his father's instructions and minded them well. He was an astute young minnow, a moderate liberal in views, and he realized that life was a good bit harder than a feather bed. "Watch out, old boy," he said to himself, "or you'll never know when'll be the end of you!" And with that he set about the business of life. The first thing he did was to fashion for himself a burrow into which he and he alone could creep. A whole year it took him to hollow it out with his nose. And, oh, the terrors he went through! The nights he spent in the slime, in the sedge or under the water burdock! At last, he finished it, and a fine burrow it was, clean and tidy, with just enough space for one. The next thing he did was to arrange the daily round of his life. At night when man, beast, bird and fish are sleeping, he would take exercise, while by day he would huddle up and shiver in his hole. But requiring victuals like all others and not drawing a

salary or keeping servants, he would have to pop out about midday when the fish are full, and hunt up a worm or so if lucky. If not, he would slink back hungry into his burrow and lie there shivering again. "Better no grub and a whole skin, than lose your life with a full belly!"

And he lived up to his programme. At night he took exercise and bathed by moonlight, and by day huddled and shivered in his hole. Only at noon would he sally forth for a few mouthfuls. But it's little use hunting at noontide, when gnats shelter from the heat under leaves and bugs hide under bark. Oftener than not he would gulp a few draughts of water and have to be thankful.

Day in and day out he lay in his burrow, with hardly a wink of sleep and scarcely a bite of food, merely thinking: "Guess I'm alive! God, what will tomorrow bring?"

But now and again he would doze off and dream he had won two hundred thousand in a lottery. Wild with excitement he would turn over on his side, and—powers above! half his nose would be poking out of the hole! What if a pikelet were about? He'd drag him straight out, no doubt about it.

He woke up once from a doze like that and what should he see but a lobster right in front of his hole. There it was, staring, motionless, at the Minnow with its stony eyes, only its whiskers wriggling in the stream. The poor old Minnow got the scare of his life that time. It stayed there half the day, did that lobster, right until dark, waiting for the Minnow to swim out. And all the while the Minnow sat in his hole and shivered and shivered and shivered.

Another time he'd just got back after daybreak, yawning deliciously with the foretaste of sleep, when what should he see but a pike right at the doorway snapping its teeth. It spent the whole day there, lying in wait, as if the sight of the Minnow was a treat itself. But the sharp little Minnow dodged it. He didn't come out—that's all.

It wasn't once and it wasn't twice these things happened.

Not by a long way. Every day the Minnow won such shivering victories and every evening he exclaimed: "Thank goodness, I'm still alive!"

But that wasn't all. He never married, did that Minnow, and he never had children, although his father's family had been quite a large one. "Father's life was a joke compared to mine," he reasoned. "The pike those days were much kinder, and the perch, too, didn't care for us small fry. And although my father almost landed in fish soup once, there was an old man handy to set him free. But nowadays fish are scarce in the river, so the Minnow, too, has come into esteem. Ah, no, no use even thinking of having a family. Keep alive yourself, it's about as much as one can do."

In this way the Sapient Minnow lived to a hundred years and more, all in a tremble day after day. He had no friends or relatives, he paid no visits and received no guests; he didn't play cards, drink wine or smoke tobacco, and never ran after pretty girls. All he did was just shiver and shake and think to himself: "Thank goodness, I'm still alive!"

At length even the pike—even they began to praise him. "Wouldn't it be fine if the riverfolk all lived like that! How quiet it would be in the river." They said this on purpose, of course, to lure the Minnow out. He never fell into that snare though, but baffled his foes once again.

How many years he lived after the first hundred, we can't say. But finally his hour struck. He lay dying in his burrow and he thought: "Thank Heaven, I'm dying my own death, like my mother and father before me." And here he recalled the words of the pike: "Wouldn't it be fine if we all lived like the Sapient Minnow!" But really, what would life be like then?

He cast about with those priceless wits of his, and just as if someone had whispered it, he suddenly had the thought: "Why, if that were so the very race of minnow would die out!"

The first thing needed to carry on the race is a family. And a family this Minnow never had. But that wasn't the whole

story. For the race of minnows to prosper and thrive, for its members to flourish, they should grow up in their native element and not in dark holes like his, where he'd gone half-blind in the eternal gloom. The young minnows must receive proper nourishment and must not avoid company; they must make each other's acquaintance and take over each other's virtues and accomplishments. In this way alone can they perfect the species and prevent their degenerating into sparling.

It is a wrong notion that only those minnows who stay in their holes shivering and half-mad with fear can be regarded as worthy citizens. No, they are not citizens at all, but at best, worthless fry. Neither cold nor warmth do they inspire in others, neither fame nor infamy comes to them, no honour and no dishonour. Their life is nothing but a waste of food and space.

The Minnow realized all this so vividly, so keenly, that he was gripped with the desire to rush out and parade down the river with head high. But the thought had barely gone through his mind when he took fright again. And so in an agony of fear he lay dying. Shivering he had lived, and shivering he would die.

In a flash his whole life passed before him. What joy did he ever have? To whom did he offer any comfort or friendly advice? Had he ever sheltered or warmed or defended anyone? Who ever heard or thought of him? The answer was: nobody, none.

He had lived and shivered and nothing else. Even now, with death at his doorstep, the Minnow quaked with a fear of he knew not what. It was dark and stuffy in his hole, nowhere to move even. No sunbeam or warmth could steal into it. And the Minnow lay there in his damp, dim burrow, unseeing, helpless, unwanted, waiting till death from starvation should free him of his worthless existence.

He could hear other fish darting by, minnows like himself, perhaps. Not one of them cared a feather about him, not a fish would think: "Let me ask the Sapient Minnow how it is he lived to a hundred-odd years and never got swallowed by a pike, or snapped in two by a lobster, or caught on an angler's hook?"

No, they just swam past, every one of them. And they didn't even know, perhaps, that there in his burrow the Sapient Minnow was nearing his end.

What stung most of all, he never heard mention of his marvellous sense. "You know the fat-head who refuses to eat and drink, who will not see anyone or let anyone see him, but just hangs on to that worthless life of his?" Nothing else would anyone say except some who simply called him a fool and a disgrace and wondered how the river could stand such a nuisance.

And so the Minnow pondered and pondered till at last he fell into a doze. It wasn't a doze, though, but the stupor preceding death. The first whispers of death sounded in his ears, and its faintness spread over his body. And once again he dreamed his pet dream: he had won two hundred thousand and grown half a yard long so he could gobble a pike himself.

And while he was dreaming, little by little, his nose edged right out of the hole....

And all of a sudden he vanished. What had happened—had a pike gulped him down, or a lobster snapped him in two, or had he died a natural death, nobody was there to tell. Most likely, he just died. For what joy could a pike find in swallowing an aged and dying Minnow, and a *Sapient Minnow* at that?...

THE SELFLESS RABBIT

A rabbit committed an offence against a wolf. The rabbit, you see, had been running near the den when the wolf spotted him and called out: "Bunny dear, please stop for a moment." But the rabbit had not only disobeyed, but hurried on still faster. So, of course, in three bounds the wolf caught him up. "Now," said the wolf, "for not having stopped when told, I condemn you to capital punishment by tearing to bits. However, since my wife and I are not hungry, and we have supplies for five days, you shall sit under this bush and await your turn. Perhaps ... ha-ha ... I may pardon you yet."

So the rabbit, poor fellow, sat on his haunches under the bush and never budged. All he thought of was how many hours remained till death. He would steal a look at the den, and there the grey wolf's eye would be glaring at him. At times it was

worse—the wolf and his mate came out and strolled in front of the rabbit. They'd eye him slyly and the wolf would say something in his wolfish lingo to his mate, and both would begin to laugh: "Haw-haw!" The cubs, too, would join them and run playfully to the rabbit, fawning on him and snapping their teeth. The poor rabbit's heart all but sunk into his paws.

Never had he loved life more than now. He was a serious young chap, and had already chosen a fiancée, the daughter of a worthy old widow. It was to them, to his future bride, he was running when the wolf collared him. She, poor dear, would be waiting for him, and thinking: "Perhaps my Cross-eyes is being false to me!" Or, it may be that after waiting she has found another. Or perhaps she frolicked in the bushes until snap!—the wolf got her.

So ran his thoughts, and he almost choked with tears, poor fellow. All his happy rabbit dreams were going to the dogs. He'd reckoned on getting married in a few days and already imagined himself and young Mrs. Rabbit at tea, and now, instead, here he was! Ah, how many hours were left till death?

One night he sat there and dozed. He dreamed that the wolf had appointed him his special agent, and that while Bunny was absent on missions, he paid visits to Mrs. Bunny. . . . He awoke with a start, as if someone had poked him in the ribs. He looked around and saw his brother-in-law to be. "Wake up! Your bride is dying!" he said. "She took ill the moment she heard of your plight, and she's afraid that she'll die without being able to say good-bye to her dearie!"

As the doomed rabbit listened, the news tore his poor heart to pieces. What had he done to deserve such a fate? Never in his life had he conspired, or made revolutions, or taken to arms against the powers that be. He had just been running on his own private business—could that warrant death? Death—just think, what a dreadful word it is—yes, and death not for

him alone, but for her, too, the poor grey darling, whose only guilt was that she loved her Bunny with all her heart! Oh, if only he could, he would fly straight to her, take her long ears in his paws, and stroke and kiss her little head a thousand times.

"Let's make a run for it!" the messenger was saying in the meantime.

Upon hearing these words, the victim seemed transformed. He had already hunched himself, ears back. One leap—and he would be gone. He should not have turned to look at the den at that moment; but alas, he did, and as he did so, his heart fell.

"I can't," he murmured, "the wolf's orders." The wolf, meanwhile, having seen and heard everything, was saying something in a soft whisper to his mate; they must have been praising the rabbit's good behaviour.

"Let's run!" urged the messenger.

"But I can't!" repeated the victim.

"What's that whispering, you plotters?" roared the wolf unexpectedly.

The rabbits were petrified. The messenger was in for it, too!

Inciting a sentry to abandon his post—what's the penalty for that? What *do* the rules say? Just think! Now the little grey rabbit would lose both sweetheart and brother-in-law. They would be devoured by the wolf and his family!

And scarcely had the two little Bunnies recovered their wits, when before them stood the wolf and his mate, teeth snapping, hard eyes gleaming like torches.

"Oh-oh, Your Honour, we didn't mean any harm, we were just talking. This is my neighbour; he's come to see me, that's all!" whispered the victim, almost dead with fright.

"You don't mean harm? I know you better than you think! You can't be trusted with a carrot. Now, then, what is it? Out with it, you two!"

"Well, it's like this, Your Honour," slipped in the second rabbit, "my sister, his fiancée, I mean, is dying, and wants to say farewell to him—so please be kind and let him go for a while."

"H'm. It's good to hear of a bride loving her bridegroom," remarked the she-wolf. "That means they'll have a lot of baby rabbits—more food for us wolves. We love each other, too, my husband and I, and we've got lots of cubs as well. Four of them are living with us, and as for the ones that have left home—there's no counting them. Wolf, wolf, shouldn't we let him go to say good-bye to his bride?"

"But he is to be eaten tomorrow!"

"Oh, Your Honour, I'd be back in no time! Honest, I would!" the victim spoke up breathlessly, and so that the wolf shouldn't doubt his earnestness, he put on such a plucky look that the wolf couldn't help admiring him and wished he himself had such bonny lads for soldiers.

Meanwhile the she-wolf, too, had become sad and thoughtful. "Just imagine," she said aloud, "a simple rabbit and how he loves his mate!" After that what could the wolf do but parole Bunny, on condition, of course, that he returned in time. Meanwhile, he would detain the brother-in-law as a hostage.

"If you're not back by six in the morning the day after tomorrow, I'll eat him," said the wolf. "Should you come back, though, I'll eat you both, but perhaps, ha-ha, I may pardon you. . . ."

The rabbit shot off like an arrow. The very earth trembled at his pace. If a mountain blocked his way, he just bounded over it, if a river—he didn't even look for a ford, but swam across, and if he came to a swamp, he'd still fly along and clear five hummocks at a leap. And no wonder he sped so—his home lay in the Thrice-Ninth Kingdom and he had to take a steam-bath and get married (yes, married at all costs!) and return in time for the wolf's breakfast.

Even the birds marvelled at his speed. "There," they exclaimed, "the *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* says that rabbits have steam instead of souls, and yet just look at him hurtling on!"

At long last he reached home, and the joy he felt—no tale can tell nor pen describe. The moment she saw her darling, the little grey rabbit forgot all about her illness. She stood on her haunches, took a tiny drum and beat the cavalry march with her forepaws. She'd learned the trick as a surprise for her sweetheart. And the old widow, her mother, nearly went off her head. She fussed about with her prospective son-in-law and didn't know where to seat him or what to treat him with. And the countless aunts came running up with all the other relations and friends of the family, everyone eager to catch a glimpse of the bridegroom and, perhaps, even taste some of the titbits on the wedding table.

Only the bridegroom seemed as if he were sitting on pins. He hadn't exchanged two kisses with his darling, when he began to urge: "Oh, I wish I could have a bath and get married as quickly as possible!"

"What's the hurry, Bunnikins dear?" the widow smiled at him.

"I must be back by tomorrow. The wolf let me off for one day only."

And then, sobbing bitterly, he told the whole story. He wasn't enamoured of going back at all, but go he must. He'd given his word, you see, and a rabbit should be master of his word. The aunts and cousins put their heads together and they, too, were of the same opinion. "You are right, Bunny. A promise is a promise, and never in the whole history of rabbitdom has a rabbit ever broken a promise."

A tale is quickly told, but things are done even more quickly among the rabbits. By morning Bunny had been wed and evening found him taking leave of his young wife.

"The wolf will eat me, that's certain. So be true to me, and should you have children, don't spoil them. The best thing would be to send them to a circus. There they'll learn not only drumming, but also how to shoot peas from a pop-gun."

And then, suddenly, as if dreaming (the wolf must have come to his mind again), he added: "Maybe the wolf will pardon me—ha-ha!"

And that was the last they saw of him.

Now during the time that Bunny had been celebrating his nuptials and enjoying life, the country that lay between his home and the wolf's den had been visited by dire calamities. One place had been deluged with rain, and the river, which had been so easily swum by the rabbit, had flooded its banks and spread for a good ten versts. At another place King Andron had declared war on King Nikita and a battle was raging on the field that our rabbit had to cross. In a third place cholera had broken out, so that the rabbit had to go a good hundred versts out of his way to avoid the quarantine posts. And what countless numbers of wolves, foxes and owls there were, lying in ambush at every step.

Now, Bunny was quite a shrewd rabbit and had so calculated things that an extra three hours should be at his disposal. But when he began to encounter one obstacle after another, his blood froze in his veins. He ran all day and he ran all night, his paws lacerated by sharp flints, and his fur torn in shreds by the needle-pointed twigs that barred his way; his eyes dimmed, and his mouth was flecked with crimson froth. And he still had a terribly long way to run. And as he ran thoughts of the friend he had left as hostage would not leave his mind. He pictured him standing sentry at the wolf's door, counting the hours until his dear brother-in-law would come to his rescue. And so Bunny ran still faster. Hills, dales, forests, bogs—all were nothing to him. And oh, the times his heart

was just ready to burst. But he took his heart in hand, too, so that fruitless anxiety shouldn't keep him from his purpose. This was no time for tears and sorrow! All feelings must be silenced! The thing that mattered now was his friend in danger, he must save him from the wolf's fangs.

And now at last dawn was beginning to break. The owls and bats had retired to their repose and a chill spread through the air. Suddenly everything became quiet, as if all life had departed. But Bunny ran on and on, and uppermost was the thought: "Shall I be in time to save him?"

The East became crimson; the first glow of the dawn was flecking the clouds on the distant horizon. The glow became brighter and brighter, till at last it broke out in a real conflagration. The dew on the grass caught fire. The birds woke up and the ants crept out together with the worms and beetles. A smokelike haze drifted from somewhere and a murmur spread louder and louder over the oats and rye. But Bunny was deaf and blind to everything; he kept repeating over and over again: "Lost! My friend is lost!"

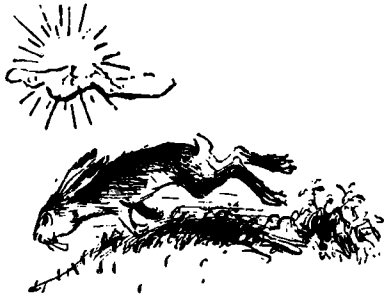
But here at last was the hill and the swamp and beyond, the wolf's den. You are late, Bunny, late! He summoned his last strength to reach the hill-top: and, at last, there he was. But he was all out; he fell, completely exhausted... surely he would never be in time.

The den lay straight ahead. Somewhere in the distance a clock struck six and each stroke echoed like the blow of a hammer in the heart of the utterly exhausted creature. At the last stroke the wolf came out of his den, stretched himself and wagged his tail in pleasant anticipation. He approached the hostage, took him in his paws and sunk his claws in his victim's belly, in order to tear him in halves—one for himself and the other for his mate. The cubs were there, too, sniffing around their mother and father, snapping their teeth, taking a lesson.

"Here, here I am!" shouted Bunny with the strength of a hundred thousand rabbits, and he rolled head over heels down the hillside into the swamp.

And the grey wolf praised him:

"I see now," he said, "that rabbits can really be trusted. Well, here is my decision: both of you will sit under this bush until you are needed. It may be that afterwards—haw-haw—I might even pardon you!"



THE VIRTUES AND THE VICES

The Virtues and the Vices had been split by feuds since the days of yore. The Vices made the most of life and conducted their business cleverly, while the Virtues' existence was a trifle less bright, but then they were cited as an example in all A B C's and school readers. Yet in spite of that honour they used to think secretly: "Ah, wouldn't it be grand if we, too, could manage a nice little deal or two, just like the Vices do!" To do them justice, that was the very thing they did on the quiet.

It is difficult to say what first made them quarrel, or who began it. It looks, though, as if the Virtues were the initiators. Sin, now, was a spry old body, the very devil at all kinds of cunning pranks. When he first set out, covering space with his mighty strides, like a swift steed, and swaggered all over the world in his raiment of gold and silks—why, the Virtues were

simply no match for him. And that being so, the Virtues were sore vexed.

"Never mind," said they, shaking their fists at Sin, "go on, swank in your silks and satins, impostor! The people will honour us, Virtues, as we are, in sackcloth and tatters."

But the Vices just answered: "Go on, be honoured, and God bless you!"

The sneer was too much for our friends the Virtues, and they went their way, cursing the Vices on all the highways and by-ways. At the cross-roads, wearing their sackcloth and tatters, they would pester passers-by: "Tell us truly, you honest folk, are we not near and dear to you even in our rags?"

But the passers-by would answer:

"Now then, ragamuffins, there are much too many of you about lately! Get a move on, don't stand in the way. God will help you!"

The Virtues tried their luck with the law, applying for aid to its guardians, the police.

"Where are your eyes? Look what loose rein you've given the public! Why, the first thing you know, the people will be up to their ears in sin!"

But the police just stood there and touched their caps to the Vices. And again the Virtues were the losers; all they could do was to threaten:

"Just wait! You'll get a good spell of hard labour for your doings!"

Meanwhile the Vices were stepping out more and more briskly—and bragging about it, too.

"Ho, ho, what a scare you gave us!" they jeered. "Hard labour indeed! About us, it isn't half settled yet, whether we'll go or not. But you've been up to your ears in hard labour ever since you were born! Boo, spiteful things! All skin and bones, and yet just look at them glowering! They snap their teeth at the pie, but don't know how to tackle it!"

In short, the feud grew worse and worse daily. At times it even developed into a pitched battle, but here, too, fortune on most occasions deserted the Virtues. The Vices would get the upper hand and clap the Virtues in irons. "Stay there and don't budge, you trouble-makers!" And stay there they would until the powers that be stepped in and released them.

It was during one of these battles that Ivanushka the Fool, happening to pass by, stopped and said to the combatants:

"My, but you are a silly lot! What on earth are you doing to one another? In the beginning you were all alike, just *attributes*, and it was only later, thanks to human sloppiness and chicanery, that Virtues and Vices came about. Some attributes were suppressed, others were given free rein—and so the wheels and the cogs in the machine got out of order. And then Confusion, Dissension and Sorrow took over in the world.... But I'll tell you what you might do: turn to the Source Primeval; perhaps you'll meet at some point!"

So spoke Ivanushka the Fool and, having spoken, continued on his way to the treasury to pay his taxes.

Whether it was that the Fool's words had an effect on them, or whether they had run short of powder and couldn't go on with the fight, the fact remains that the warriors sheathed their swords and got to thinking.

The Virtues, however, did most of the thinking—they were ravenously hungry, poor beggars—as for the Vices, no sooner had the cease-fire sounded than they wandered off to attend to their rascally affairs and again lived famously.

"It's all very well for the Fool to chatter about *attributes*," said Humility, the first to speak up. "We know as much about attributes as he does! But there are *attributes* that strut about in velvet and eat off gold, whilst others walk around in shabby clothes and go a whole day without food! That's no skin off the d— Fool's nose; he's stuffed his tummy with chaff and feels righteous; but you don't catch old birds like us with chaff—we know a hawk from a handsaw!"

"Besides, where did he dig up those *attributes*?" grumbled Decorum in semi-alarm. "Doesn't it sound queer to all of you? Virtues there have always been, and Vices, too; it has been going on for hundreds of thousands of years and hundreds of thousands of huge volumes have been written on the subject. And along comes that fellow and thinks he's cleverest of all; *attributes*! No, you go and tackle those hundreds of thousands of books first, and just see the dust that will rise from them!"

They jawed away in this strain and finally decided: Decorum had spoken truly. For how many thousands of centuries had the Virtues been regarded as Virtues and the Vices—Vices! The thousands and thousands of volumes written on the subject! The mountains of paper and oceans of ink it had taken! The Virtues had always stood on the right hand, the Vices on the left, and now, suddenly, if one were to believe the Fool, everything had to be crossed out and be replaced by *attributes* of some kind. Why, it was almost as bad as renouncing one's status and calling oneself *human*! Maybe it sounded simple enough, but then there are times when simplicity is worse than robbery. Just go and touch something "in all simplicity"! From the very first step you'll encounter so many pitfalls that you'll be lucky if you don't leave your head behind you.

No, it's no good thinking about *attributes*. Another matter if they could find a compromise (or strike a bargain, as they say); *that* might be worth while. A bargain that might cheer up the Virtues and yet not look bad to the Vices, either. For after all, even the Vices sometimes get into trouble. Only the other day Lust had been caught red-handed in the baths and proceedings had been instituted. And that very night Fornication had been thrown down several flights of stairs in nothing but her underwear. And was it so very long since Free-Thinking had been in full bloom? And now it had been uprooted completely! So it looks as if a deal wouldn't be disadvantageous for the Vices, either.

"Ladies and Gentlemen Virtues! What suggestions have you to offer? Who has some kind of a little expedient in mind?"

The first to respond to this call was a little old greybeard known as Experience (there are two varieties of Experience: Vicious and Virtuous, and this fellow was one of the Virtuous), and his motion was this:

"Search," he said to his fellow Virtues, "for a jewel of a person who will be respected by the Virtues and, at the same time, acceptable to the Vices. Find him and send him with a flag of truce to the enemy's camp."

They searched around for a while, and, of course, found what they wanted in the shape of two aged spinsters: Moderation and Orderliness. The two of them lived in the slum quarter of the Virtues' settlement and were supposed to be poor orphans but they peddled home-distilled spirits and even had doings with the Vices on the sly.

The first pancakes, as the saying goes, are always lumpy. The two widows weren't exactly attractive and were much too yielding to do the job assigned them. They had scarcely set foot in the Vices' camp and opened up with their drawl: "Little by little, slow but sure" when the entire Vice pack raised a howl against them:

"Get out, we've heard all that patter before. You've been stalking us with oats for a long time now, but that's not our fare! Off with you, out of our sight! Save your breath!"

And as if to show the Virtues that they weren't to be had with such humbug, they had an all-night spree at the Samarkand Hotel, and in the morning, when leaving, they caught Abstinence and Chastity, and what they did to those poor girls was so utterly despicable that even the Tartar waiters at the Samarkand were shocked. "Such smart young gentlemen, and yet see what they are doing!"

At this the Virtues realized that things had taken a grave turn and ought to be tackled in real earnest.

There had sprouted up among them about this time a creature of neuter gender: neither fish, flesh nor good red herring; neither knight nor lady, just a pinch of both. It had sprouted, straightened up and bloomed. And this indeterminate intermediate of the neuter gender bore the name: Hypocrisy.

Everything about this being was dark, beginning with its origin. Old-timers used to say that once upon a time Resignation and Lechery had come to an understanding in a dark hallway, and that this was the fruit of that union. The fruit had been nurtured and looked after by the joint efforts of the Virtues, who then placed it in the boarding-school run by M-me Commeilfaut, a Frenchwoman. This surmise as to its origin was supported by Hypocrisy's outward habit, inasmuch as, although it never went out but with eyes downcast, close observers had noted more than once that lecherous shadows appeared rather often on its face, while its buttocks, on occasion, would quiver in a way that was far from decorous. Doubtlessly, M-me Commeilfaut's boarding-school was to blame in no small measure for this outward equivoque. As a pupil there Hypocrisy had mastered all the major subjects: *walking a chalked line*, and *not letting butter melt in your mouth*, everything that assures a virtuous life. But at the same time it had not escaped the influence of the cancan, of which the walls and the very air of the boarding-school reeked. In addition, M-me Commeilfaut had made things worse by imparting to Hypocrisy the particulars concerning its parents. As to the father, Lechery, it confessed that he was *mauvais ton* and insolent—always trying to pinch you. About the mother, Resignation, it admitted that, although far from charming in her looks, she, nevertheless, cried "Oh!" so prettily when she was pinched that even the Vices (such as Venality, Flunkeyism, Despondence and the like), not given to amatory pinching, well, even they couldn't deny themselves this pleasure.

And it was none other than this neuter being, which kept its eyes bent on the floor and yet threw lascivious glances all

round from under its lowered eyelids, whom the Virtues chose to enter into parley with the Vices, and to try for a *modus vivendi* which would enable both one group and the other to lead a free and easy life.

"Yes, but do you know how to act in our way?" Gallant Behaviour had the notion of putting the candidate through an examination.

"Who, me?" said the surprised Hypocrisy. "Why, I go about it like this."

And before the Virtues could think twice, Hypocrisy had its pious little eyes cast down, its hands folded on its bosom and the daintiest of blushes mantling its innocent dimpled cheeks. A downright virgin, what more would you have!

"Ha-ha, what an artful one! Well, and what about the ways of the Vices?"

But Hypocrisy didn't even bother to answer that one. In an instant it did something that no one could observe visibly, and yet so realistic that Penetration could only spit in disgust.

They then unanimously decided to have a general power of attorney drawn up by Bizyaev, well-known St. Petersburg notary, for the prosecution of the Virtues' affairs, which they forthwith placed in Hypocrisy's hands.

In for a penny, in for a pound. The pill was a bitter one, but *volens nolens* the Virtues had to sue the Vices for pardon. So Hypocrisy repaired to their odious den, and for very shame did not know where to hide its eyes. "This filth is too widespread nowadays!" it complained aloud, and added mentally: "My! what a wonderful life the Vices are having!" Indeed, Hypocrisy hadn't gone a mile from the Virtues' quarters, when a sea of mirth roared around it—laughter, dancing, games—the air reverberated with the sounds of revelry. And what a delightful town the Vices had built themselves: spacious, well-lighted, with avenues and streets, squares and boulevards. There was a Perjury Street, and a Treason Square, and even a Disgrace

Boulevard. The Father of Lies himself had a booth there, dealing out slander, wholesale and retail.

But gaily as they lived and skilled as they were in all the refinements of trickery, even the Vices when they laid eyes on Hypocrisy could do nothing but gasp. In appearance it was a virgin, for all the world, but whether this was really so, the Devil himself could not make out. The Father of Lies who thought there was no earthly filth that he could not surpass—even his eyes popped out.

"Well," he admitted, "I was a fool to imagine that I am the most pestilent creature in the world. What am I compared to that? Here's the *real* viper, I must say! My way of doing things is to do them straight; that's why, not very often, 'tis true, I get thrown out with a kick as a reminder. But this precious baggage, if it clings to you once, you'll never get rid of it; you'll get tangled and twined, and held until you're drained to the dregs!"

But for all the enthusiasm engendered by Hypocrisy, it didn't pass without dispute here either. The more solid citizens among the Vices—those who valued tradition above all (such pillars as Sophistry, Inanity, Misanthropy and their ilk)—not only refrained from going forward to meet Hypocrisy, but warned others as well: "A true Vice has no need of concealment," said they, "he holds his banner aloft, with open defiance. What substantial novelty can Hypocrisy reveal to us that we haven't known and practised since the beginning of time? Absolutely none. On the contrary, it will teach us dangerous subterfuges, and force us, if not to be actually ashamed of ourselves, then, at any rate, to assume an air of being so. *Caveant consules!* Until now we have had no lack of firm and faithful followers, but eventually, they too, beholding our subterfuge, may say: 'The Vices must really be very hard up: they have fallen so low as to deny their own selves!' And they'll turn away from us Vices—turn away they will! Just wait!"

Thus spake the inveterate Vice-Catos who acknowledged no

new tendencies, no temptations and no circumstances. Born on a dunghill they preferred to get choked in it rather than depart from the traditions of their grandsires.

Apart from these there was another category of Vices which likewise exhibited no special enthusiasm at meeting Hypocrisy, and not because it disgusted them, but because they had already established secret contact with the Virtues without Hypocrisy's mediation. To this category belonged Perfidy, Disloyalty, Treachery, Talebearing, Chicanery and the like. They uttered no cries of triumphant greeting, engaged in no handclapping and gave no toasts; they merely winked to Hypocrisy on the sly, as much as to say: "Ah, here you are! Make yourself at home!"

Be that as it may, Hypocrisy's triumph was, nevertheless, assured. The youthful spirits, in the persons of Fornication, Inebriation, Ruffianism and so on, immediately called a rally and gave the truce-bearer such an ovation that Sophistry was obliged to stop grumbling for good.

"You're just setting folks in a turmoil, you superannuated rascals!" the youngsters shouted at the elders. "We want to live, and you act like dampers on us. Hooray! We'll be put into the school readers (this seemed especially fempting), we'll shine in the salons! The spinsters will adore us!"

In a word, grounds for agreement were found at once, so that when Hypocrisy, upon returning to its own parts, reported to the Virtues, it was unanimously agreed that every reason for the separate existence of Virtues and Vices as inimical groups had been eliminated for all time. Nevertheless, they hadn't the pluck to abrogate the old nomenclature. Who knows, but it might not come in handy again? They thereupon decided to use it with such discretion that everyone should know that the terms meant nothing but ashes and dust.

From then on great hospitality prevailed between the Vices and the Virtues. If Dissoluteness had a fancy to stay a while with Abstinence, he'd offer his arm to Hypocrisy—and Absti-

nence, having already caught sight of them from afar, would come to greet them:

"Welcome! Step right in! We were talking about you only the other day...."

Or the other way round. If Abstinence felt like trying a tasty Lenten dish at Dissoluteness' place she'd offer her arm to Hypocrisy, and Dissoluteness would have the door flung wide open to receive them:

"Welcome! Step right in! We were talking about you only the other day!"

On fast days they treated each other to Lenten dainties; on days when fasting was relaxed they would indulge in forbidden ones. With one hand they'd make the sign of the cross, and, with the other, do the most outrageous things. One eye would be turned to heaven, the other lusting ever so busily and unceasingly. For the first time the Virtues came to know sweetmeats, but the Vices were not behindhand either. On the contrary, they were saying to each and all: never have we tasted such dainties as now!

As for poor little Ivanushka the Fool, he can't get things straight to this day: how is it that the Virtues and the Vices so willingly made peace through the mediation of Hypocrisy, when it would have been much more natural to have met on the common ground that both the one group and the other are nothing but *attributes* and let it go at that!

BEARS IN GOVERNMENT

Villainies of the graver kind often receive the title of glorious and as such are entered in the annals of History. Petty villainies, on the contrary, are usually branded as shameful and never lead History into error or win the praises of contemporaries.

I. GOVERNOR BRUIN THE FIRST

Bruin the First was well aware of all this. The brute had a long career behind him; he could build a den and root up trees; hence, with certain allowances, he could pass for an expert engineer. His greatest merit, however, was his ardent desire to figure in the annals of History. For this reason he preferred the glories of bloodshed to everything else in the

world. And so, whatever he spoke of, be it commerce, industry or science, he always ended the same: "Blood, sirs, blood, that's what we need."

For this the Lion soon raised him to the rank of Major and appointed him temporary governor to a distant forest to suppress local opposition.

The forest subjects of His Majesty heard of this appointment with dismay. There was such licence among the woodfolk at the time that each lived as he liked. Beasts ran, birds flew and insects crawled, but nobody wanted to march. The folk knew well that they wouldn't be patted on the back, but had gone too far to return to reason unaided. "Just wait till the Major comes," the folk said, "he'll show us!"

And sure enough, they hadn't winked twice, when Bruin, the new governor, arrived. He reached his residence early in the morning of St. Michael's Day and immediately resolved: tomorrow would see bloodshed. What made him adopt this decision is unknown: for as a matter of fact he was not really spiteful—just a brute, that's all.

And he would not have failed in his purpose if the Father of Sin had not tempted him.

The point is that while contemplating bloodshed he took it into his head to celebrate his birthday. He bought himself a pail of vodka and got drunk all on his own. And as he hadn't built himself a den as yet, he was obliged, drunk though he was, to sleep in the open, right in the middle of the forest. There he lay and snored away. As luck would have it, when morning broke a siskin happened to fly over the spot where he slept. Now this was no ordinary siskin, but a very clever one. He could fetch a pail of water, and even sing, if need be, in place of a canary. All the birds were very proud of their siskin. "Our siskin will soon qualify for a medal!" His fame reached the ears of the Lion himself, and many a time His Majesty would exclaim to the Ass, then counted the wisest of counsellors: "Oh, if I could hear him sing in my clutches!"

But shrewd though he was, this time the siskin came amiss. Taking his perch on our Bruin, whom he mistook for a log of rotten wood lying in the clearing, he began to warble. But Bruin was a light sleeper. When he felt someone hopping on his back, his first thought was: "That's an oppositionist!"

"What idler is hopping on the governor's posterior?" he roared out, finally.

The siskin should have flown off at once, but instead he made another blunder. He sat still and wondered: "I say! A talking log!" And naturally, the bear could not stand that. He grabbed the offender in his paw, and, still too bleary to see, gobbled him up.

Well, as we say, he gobbled the siskin, but after a while it dawned on him: what had he eaten? What kind of oppositionist could it be if nothing remained even of him on one's teeth? He thought long and hard, the rascal, but could not think of a remedy. He had eaten the siskin and that was that. The matter, silly though it was, couldn't be mended. For the most innocent bird, if he ate it, would rot in his belly the same as the worst criminal.

"What made me eat it?" Bruin asked himself. "The Lion warned me strictly before setting out: do noble deeds, but keep clear of trifles. And the first thing I do is swallow a siskin! Oh well, all right. The first pancakes are always lumpy. What a good thing it's early and there's no one around!"

Alas for Bruin! He must have forgotten that in matters of statecraft the first blunder is always the most fatal. The wrong path taken from the outset would lead the governor further and further astray. And indeed, no sooner did he seek solace in his disgrace in not being witnessed than he heard a blackbird calling from a neighbouring birch:

"Fool! he was sent here to level us flat, and there he goes swallowing siskins!"

That drove our Major stark mad. He climbed up the birch after the blackbird. But this was no fool of a bird: it had hopped

to another tree. Bruin started up that one, but the blackbird returned to the first. Up and down, up and down climbed Major Bruin, until he was out of breath. And the crow, too, coward though she was, became bold at the blackbird's example.

"Look at the brute!" she croaked. "Folks thought he'd cause real bloodshed, and there he goes eating siskins!"

So Bruin set after the crow, when hop! a little bunny jumped from the bushes:

"You great big booby; fancy eating a siskin!"

A gnat came flying, and he, too, shouted:

"*Risum teneatis, amici!** He's eaten a siskin!"

"Blessed fool! He's eaten a siskin!" croaked a frog from the marshes.

In short, it was fun for everyone except Bruin. The Major dashed hither and thither trying to catch the teasers, but all in vain. The more he rushed about, the sillier he appeared. In less than an hour everyone, young and old, knew that the Major had swallowed the siskin. The entire forest boiled with indignation. No, that wasn't what they had expected from the new governor. They thought that he would cover all the thickets and bogs with the glory of great bloodshed. And there—see what he had done. Wherever Big Bruin directed his steps the entire neighbourhood rang with the words: "Fool! Fancy eating a siskin!"

Bruin tore through the forest, roaring like mad. Only once in his life had he experienced anything like this. That was when they had driven him out of his den and set a pack of bloodhounds at his heels. The curs clung to his ears; tail and haunches—covered him all over. Yes, he'd looked death straight in the eyes that time. But still, he had shaken them off—leaving half a dozen cripples and giving the others the slip. But now there was nowhere to run. Every bush, tree and hummock seemed to be alive, taunting him. And all he could do

* Withhold your laughter, friends!

was listen! Even the stupid screech-owl hooted through the night: "Fool! He's eaten a siskin!"

But the worst of it was that it wasn't him alone being slighted: no, it was the very principle of administrative authority. Who knows, the rumour might reach the neighbouring forests and they, too, would jeer at him?

It is really astonishing the way the most trivial causes may sometimes lead to the gravest issues. That siskin—a snip of a bird, you may say—and yet it had ruined the name of a huge meat-eater. Until he'd devoured the siskin, nobody ever thought of calling him a fool. No, never! It was always "Your Honour," "You're like a father to us!" It was known to everyone that the Ass himself had solicited for Bruin with the Lion. And whenever the Ass thinks well of a person, there ought to be something in it. But now a mere trifle, a slip of management had opened all eyes. And all tongues at once had gone off like revolvers: "The Fool! He's eaten a siskin!" It was just as if someone had driven a schoolboy to suicide by excessive pedagogical strictness. No, no, it wouldn't compare even with that, for driving a schoolboy to suicide was not just a shameful act, but downright villainy, and might even merit the regard of History. But a siskin—just think of eating a siskin!

"What a laugh, folks!" chorused the sparrows, hedgehogs and frogs.

At first Bruin's deed evoked indignation. What a disgrace for the forest! Then they began to tease him—first neighbours, then strangers; birds first, then frogs, gnats, flies—everyone. The whole swamp, the whole forest just bellowed with laughter.

"So that's what public opinion means, then," lamented the Major, rubbing his sore, bruised nose with his paw. "What if I get into History with that siskin?"

History being such a great affair, even our Bruin waxed thoughtful at its mention. Personally, Bruin had a very dim notion of it, but had heard from the Ass that it was dreaded by the Lion himself. It wouldn't be meet, the Ass said, to fig-

ure in its annals in such brutal guise. Only really first-rate bloodshed earns credit with History, while minor villainies are merely spat upon. A different matter if he'd started by slaughtering a drove of cattle, plundering a village, or pulling down a forester's hut log by log. Then, History might.... But no, in such circumstances he wouldn't care a straw about History! The Ass would write him a letter of congratulation and that would be the main thing. And now—only think of it—the glory of eating a siskin! Just fancy—galloping a good thousand versts, wasting God knows how much road-money—and then the first thing he does is to go and eat a siskin. Ah, dear, dear! Even the tiniest schoolboy will laugh at him. The wild Tungus, the steppeland Kalmyk—henceforth all will say that instead of suppressing opposition, as he was told, Major Bruin came and ate a siskin! And the Major has cubs of his own at school; until this moment, as a sign of respect, they were called Major's Children. But now their schoolmates will tease them to death: "Siskin-Eater! Siskin-Eater!" they will shout at them. God alone knows the amount of "bloodshed" it'll need to make up for such shame. How many people will have to be robbed, plundered, murdered!

Accursed be the days when the bulwark of national welfare is built on gross atrocities! But shame, a thousand times more shame on the epoch that thinks to achieve the same ends by crimes of the most petty, disgusting order!

Panic seized Bruin. He lost his sleep and received no dispatches; all he could think of was: "What would the Ass say when he heard?"

Then, like a dream coming true, the mail brought a sudden inquiry from the Ass: "His Majesty has been informed that you have failed to suppress the opposition and have eaten a siskin. Is that true?"

Bruin was forced to own up. He sent an official explanation expressing his regret and sat down to wait. The answer, of

course, could be only: "Fool! Siskin-Eater!" But privately the Ass made it known to the culprit (the bear had sent a keg of honey with his letter) that exceptional bloodshed alone could abate the august indignation.

"Oh, if that's all, I can still recover my name!" cried Bruin and straightway fell upon and slaughtered an entire flock of sheep. Further, he detained a woman in a clump of gooseberry and took away her basket. Then he started digging up the roots of rebellion and tore up a whole forest. Finally he raided a print-shop one night, smashed the machinery, scattered the type and dumped the products of human genius into a garbage pit.

That being done he squatted on his haunches, rascal that he was, and waited for approval.

But alas! All this zeal was in vain.

Although the Ass took the first opportunity to present his feats to the Lion in the brightest colours, the latter not only refused to reward him, but with his own royal paw scratched in the margin: "Do not bileev this officer is braiv; this iz the shelfshame Bruin that swallowed my pet siskin!"

And promptly ordered the Major to be transferred to the infantry.

And so Bruin the First remained a Major to the end of his days. But had he started with the print-shop, no doubt he would now be a general.

II. BRUIN THE SECOND

It happens, however, that even the most brilliant atrocities prove futile, a lamentable instance of which was destined to be given by another Bruin.

At the time Bruin the First was displaying such prowess in governing his woods, the Lion sent another bear, also a Major and also Bruin, to fulfil the duties of governor in another forest. This one was a little more shrewd than his name-

sake, and, what is most important, realized fully that a governor's whole future depends on his very first step. So before even receiving his travelling allowance he had carefully planned his campaign, and only then set out for his governorship.

Nevertheless, his career proved still shorter than that of Bruin the First.

Chiefly, he had counted on wrecking a print-shop immediately upon his arrival—he was advised to do so by none other than the Ass. It turned out, however, that there was not a single print-shop in the forest entrusted to his care. True, some old-timers could actually recall the hand-driven press that had been set up "under that there pine-tree," used for publishing the *Forest Gazette*. But already under Magnitsky* the said press had been publicly committed to fire and the only cultural institution extant was the censorship, which imposed on the blackbirds the duty of distributing forest news. Every morning these heralds made the rounds of the forest and delivered the latest political information, without anyone suffering the slightest discomfort from the change. It was likewise known that the woodpecker was wholly taken up with writing a "History of the Wilderness" on the bark of pine-trees, but this undertaking, too, would not be long-lived, because as the work progressed the bark was being nibbled and reduced to pieces by outlaw ants. Thus it is evident that the forest folk were quite ignorant of the past and present and never showed any interest in the future. In other words, they simply dallied, wrapped in the obscurity of the times.

Then the Major inquired if the forest hadn't at least a university or some academy which he might burn down. But in this respect, too, as in others, it turned out that Magnitsky had anticipated his intentions, enrolling all university students as soldiers of remote garrisons and confining the academicians in a hollow tree, where, submerged in lethargy, they remain

* Magnitsky—double-dyed reactionary and enemy of education; lived in the reign of Alexander I (1777-1825).—*Ed.*

to this day. The Major flew into a rage and demanded the said Magnitsky to be brought into his presence for the purpose of tearing him to bits *(similia similibus curantur).** But, to his deep regret, "the said Magnitsky" was reported defunct.

There was nothing to be done. Our Bruin sulked for a while, but did not, however, become despondent. "If the souls of these knaves can't be had, owing to the absence of such, I'll see directly to their hides!"

And straightway he acted on his words. He chose a night that he thought was dark enough and stole into the yard of a neighbouring peasant. One by one he slaughtered the horse, the cow, the pig and a couple of sheep, and although he knew that the peasant was now completely ruined, he wasn't satisfied. "Wait," he muttered, "I'll pull down your cottage and send you begging!" So saying he clambered to the roof to perpetrate his atrocity. But he had forgotten the rotten roof beam. The moment he stepped on it the roof caved in. His Honour was suspended in the air, and he knew that in a minute he would fall to the floor, which, of course, was a thing he wanted to avoid. So he hugged in his paws a broken log-end and began to roar.

The noise brought the peasants on the scene, some armed with axes, some with pitchforks. Wherever they looked they saw wreckage—fences smashed, gates open, and pools of blood in the cowshed. In the middle of the yard hung the culprit himself. "There," burst out the peasants, "look at the devil! Trying to win the favour of his chiefs, and we've got to starve! Come on, lads, let's give him a treat!" So saying they stuck a pitchfork, prongs upward, in the ground under Bruin and went on to treat him. Then they skinned him and threw his carcass into the swamp, whereby morning birds of prey had finished him off.

So a precedent was established in the forest from which it

* Like cured by like.

followed that brilliant atrocities, no less than shameful ones, could end in grief.

When the Ass submitted his report on the matter the Lion made the marginal note, scratched with his royal paw:

"Inform Bruin the Third of the verdict of History. And tell him to look sharp!"

II. BRUIN THE THIRD

Bruin the Third was shrewder than his predecessors. "Things are rotten," he said to himself when reading the Lion's comment. "Petty crimes bring sneers, and big ones bring spears! Maybe I shouldn't go at all?" He sent an official request to the Ass: "Since neither major nor minor villainies are permitted, can one indulge in crimes of medium importance?" The Ass, however, replied evasively: "All instructions on the subject will be found in the *Forest Statute.*" The Bear looked into the statute and found there rules on every subject imaginable: fur taxes, mushroom and berry duties and even fir-cone revenues. But as to villainies it was mum! To all further inquiries the Ass replied just as vaguely: "Proceed with propriety!"

"My goodness! What have we come to!" grumbled Bruin the Third. "They confer high rank on you, but about the atrocities that go with it they don't say a word."

And again he hesitated: "Should I go at all?..." And if it were not for the heaps of money waiting for him at the treasury, he certainly wouldn't have gone.

He reached the forest on his own pair of feet—extremely modest, I must say. He fixed no official reception days and appointed no hours for reports, but just dived straight into his den, stuffed his paw into his mouth and lay there sucking it. "One can't even skin a rabbit," he thought as he lay there, "or they'll count it a villainy; and who will say that? All right if it were the Lion or Ass—I wouldn't mind. But no, these common woodfolk will count, that's the worst of it. And then

there's that History of theirs! Bah! History indeed!" So he lay there, sneering at History, but deep in his heart he felt awful: he had an inkling that the Lion himself feared History. How was he to deal with the forest rabble—kill him if he knew. To have all the responsibility and not to be able to plunder! Who ever heard of such a thing? Whatever line of action he adopted, at the very start they would yell: "Stop! You're going the wrong way, sir!" Everyone has rights today—even the squirrel! A charge of shot in the muzzle—that's her rights! They have rights, you see, and he has duties—a fine state of affairs, indeed. And the duties, too—mere words at the best. The riff-raff devour each other, and he can't even skin a rabbit, confound it! And it's all because of that Ass—his sophistry, his meddling and muddling. "Who made the Ass so wondrous fleet, who gave him leave to gallop?" That's what he ought to think of hourly, instead of muttering about rights! "Proceed with propriety!" Bah!

For a long time the bear sucked his paw in this manner and didn't even start on his duties as governor. True, he once tried to announce his presence with due "propriety" by climbing to the top of the tallest tree and roaring with all his might. But that, too, was of no avail. The forest riff-raff, not having seen any villainies for a long time, had grown so insolent that the sole comment on his performance was: "You hear Bruin roaring! Must have bitten his paw in his sleep!" And with no more results than these the Major returned to his den.

But as we have already said, Bruin the Third was a sensible bear and wasn't retreating to his den to waste time on futile complaints. No, he would plan something really worth while.

And something he certainly did plan.

The point is that as he lay in his den things in the forest went on as usual. It wouldn't be right to call this state of affairs welfare. But the governor's task, after all, is not to establish an ideal order, but to support and safeguard, despite its deficiencies, the existing order which has been sanctified by ages.

Neither does it consist in perpetrating any manner of atrocities, whether minor, major or medium! Nay, he should be satisfied with the "natural" ones. And if ancient custom ordains that the wolves should skin rabbits and the hawks and owls pluck crows' feathers, although such order is not quite synonymous with welfare, it *is*, nevertheless, an order of a kind, and as such must be obeyed. And, moreover, since the rabbits and crows not only do not complain, but continue to breed and exist, it follows that the aforementioned "order" does not transgress the limits originally assigned to it. And indeed, are not these "natural" atrocities enough?

In the present instance everything proceeded exactly as described. Not once did the forest abandon the semblance ordained to it. Day and night it echoed with millions of voices, some of which were howls of agony, others—triumphant whoops. The outward appearance, the sounds, the play of light and shade, the structure of population—everything seemed petrified—immutable. In short, this was an order so firmly established and stable that the mere sight of it would compel the most vicious busy-body of a governor to dismiss all thought of self-glorifying atrocities, let alone those to be enacted on "His Honour's personal responsibility."

And so, suddenly a whole theory of ill-starred welfare took shape before the mental eye of Sir Bruin the Third, complete in all details and proved in practice. And here he recalled what the Ass had once told him in a friendly conversation:

"Why bother me with all these villainies? The main rule in statecraft is *laissez passer, laissez faire*, or, in plain Russian, one fool rides another with a third for a whip. So there you are, my friend. If you stick to this rule the villainies will occur of themselves and everything will be perfectly all right."

And so things turned out as the Ass had predicted. All one had to do was to sit and be glad that one fool was driving the other with a third for a whip. All the rest would come naturally.

"Why, I can't even see what governors are sent for...." But he hadn't got half through with this liberal bravado, when he bethought himself of his nice salary and hastily suppressed his "immodest fancies": oh no, everything's going all right! Psssst!...

With that he turned over and decided he would never leave his den except to collect his salary. From then on things in the forest went swimmingly. The Major slept, while the people brought him sucking pigs, fowl, honey and even home-made vodka, which tribute they piled at the entrance to his den. At the appointed hour the Major wakened, crawled out of the den and gorged himself.

And so Bruin stayed in his den for years. And since there were no particular interruptions in the ruffianly but generally accepted course of forest life, and no other villainies occurred save the "natural" ones, Bruin was not forgotten by the Lion either. First he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, then Colonel, and finally....

But at this delightful stage of his career, hunters raided that part of the forest and drove Bruin into the open. And there he met the fate of all fur-bearing animals.

THE DECEITFUL NEWSMONGER AND THE CREDULOUS READER

Once upon a time there lived a newspaperman and, of course, a reader. The newspaperman was a liar—he lied nonstop, and the reader, being credulous, took in everything. Ah yes, it's been the way of our world since time immemorial—liars lie, and credulous folk believe them. *Suum cuique.**

Well then, the newspaperman sat in his den and lied away. "Beware, dear reader!" he blared. "Diphtheria outbreak!" "No rain since spring!—no bread!—famine prospect!" Fire destroys towns and villages!" "Private and government property plundered!" And the reader lapped it up, and believed the newsman to be opening his eyes. "Ah, dear, dear," he sighed,

* To each his own.

"there's freedom of the press for you—fire, famine, diphtheria everywhere!"

Well, the more the merrier. The newspaperman scented that his lies were conquering the readers' hearts and he laid it on still thicker. "Bah!" he cried, "there's not even a shred of social security left! Better not go into the street, reader! First thing you know, you'll be clapped into jail!" The credulous reader strutted the streets in elation. "Ah, how true are the newsman's words about our lack of security!" And then, as if that wasn't enough, he'd meet another credulous reader and say: "Have you read today's paper? Isn't it really splendid, the way they shoot off at insecurity? Didn't it strike you, too?" "Certainly," the other credulous reader would reply, "it's just incomparable!" "Yes sir, he's hit the nail right on the head! It's impossible to walk the streets, actually impossible nowadays! One never knows when and for what one will be clapped into prison!" And so they'd talk themselves hoarse, praising freedom of the press. "We'd have known nothing about diphtheria," the credulous readers piped in chorus, "and now we do!" And they felt such immense relief at this knowledge, that if the newspaperman himself had come out and said it was just humbug, they would simply stop reading his paper.

As for the newspaperman himself, he was highly delighted—lies for him being pure profit. Not everyone is up to the job of writing truth. Anyhow, just go and try to find it. It's more than likely that you wouldn't even get it for a kopek a line. But lies—that's a different matter. Just scribble away any nonsense you like. For a kopek a line you'll have heaps of them coming in.

The newsman and the reader came to be such friends that they couldn't be parted for worlds. The more the newsman lied, the richer he became, and what more could a liar wish? And the reader, the more lies he read, the more kopeks he carried to his news agent. Retail and wholesale—the newspaperman was making money either way.

"Just look at him," envious people would hiss. "Is it long since he had no trousers—and look how he's parading now! Hired himself a toady and a folk-lore writer, too! He's certainly prospering!"

The other newspapermen would try to get round him with the truth. "Perhaps," they thought, "the subscribers will turn to us?" Not a bit of it! The readers just wouldn't pay heed, they carried on in the same way, as if affirming:

A thousand truths without regretting,
We'll swop for one inspiring lie . . .

How long it went on no one can say. But at last some kind souls turned up who were sorry for the credulous reader. They summoned the deceitful newspaperman and told him straight: "Cut out this nonsense, shameless, deceitful fellow! Till now you've made money out of lies—henceforth be good and sell truth!"

On top of that the readers gradually began to come to themselves and started sending letters like this to the newsmonger:

"Dear So-and-So, last night my daughter and I went for a stroll along the Nevsky, convinced that we would spend the night in the lock-up. As a precaution we stuffed a couple of sandwiches into Sophie's hand-bag, just in case. 'How thrilling!' the dear soul said to me. But we both returned home safe and sound. Now, would you mind explaining how such a consoling fact can be reconciled with your recent editorials on social insecurity?"

Naturally, the newspaperman on his part had anticipated this reaction. To tell the truth he himself was now fed up with lying. In his heart of hearts, you know, he'd been craving for the truth for ages. But what to do if the reader could be caught only with lies. You took it awfully, but if you wished to live, you simply had to lie. But now, with everybody so keen on having the truth —well, he would willingly oblige.

And so he began to ply his readers with daily truth. "Diphtheria has disappeared." How do you like that? No lock-ups, no fires, no nothing. And even if the town of Konotop suffered from fire, it has been completely rebuilt and is a better place than before! And the crops, thanks to the recent warm rain, they are better than ever. So much better indeed, we can eat all we want ourselves and even throw some under the table for the Germans. There, take it, G— d—!

But best of all was that although the newsman printed nothing but Gospel truth, he paid only a kopek a line. And since it was sold retail the price of truth fell. Thus it was discovered that lies and truth are all the same—both worth nothing. And the newspaper columns were not a whit duller. Quite the contrary. They were even livelier. For once you begin to describe harmony, it's a sight for the gods and nothing short of it!

And so at last the reader sobered and regained the gift of clear vision. He hadn't felt bad before, when he used to take lies for the truth, but now his mind was completely at ease. He went to the baker's and the baker would say: "It looks as if rolls will be cheaper!" And at the poulterer's, too, he'd be told: "Looks as if partridge won't cost anything soon."

"Really? and what are they now?"

"Two rubles a pair, I regret to say!"

What a change, thanks be to God.

Well, one day it happened that the credulous reader, dressed in his best, set out for a stroll in the street. He walked along "in hope and glory," swinging his cane with a happy air—"See, sirs, I'm perfectly secure and confident!"

But on this occasion, as luck would have it, the following took place. He had only taken a few steps when a legal error was made, and our credulous reader found himself locked up in prison. And there he sat pining, with nothing to eat all day. For although food was offered him, and rather courteously, too, he eyed it once or twice and just muttered:

"So that's the rich harvest we are reaping!"

And the same day he caught diphtheria.

Needless to say the legal error was corrected the very next morning, and they let him out, but only on bail (who knows—perhaps he'll be wanted yet!). And he came home, poor fellow, and died.

But as for the deceitful newspaperman, he is still going strong. He is putting the roof on his fourth mansion, and from morning till night he cogitates over the question: what is the best way to cheat the credulous reader—by telling him the truth or by lying?

THE EAGLE—PATRON OF ARTS

Much verse has been written about the eagle and all of it complimentary. His beauty is unparalleled, say the poets, his glance swift and his flight majestic. He does not fly like other birds, but soars, or swoops. And on top of that he can look at the sun and defy the thunder. Some even credit him with a noble heart. So when a poet wants to glorify a policeman he invariably likens him to the eagle. With the grace of an eagle, they say, police constable No. so-and-so hunted down, detained and, having heard, relented.

For quite a long while I believed these panegyrics. Really, how splendid, thought I: detained ... and then relented! Relented—that was the most enchanting. Pitied—who do you think?—a mouse! And what, after all, *is* a mouse? And off I would run to a poet-acquaintance to break the news of another act of mercy by the eagle. The poet would right away assume the grand pose, wheeze for a minute and begin to vomit rhyme.

But one fine morning the thought struck me: why, of all things, should the eagle pardon the mouse? The mouse ran across the road on private business, and the eagle spotted it, swooped, almost throttled it, and then ... *relented*! Why did the eagle pardon the mouse, and not the other way about?

The more I pondered the graver were my doubts. I began to listen and to investigate. Surely, something was wrong. In the first place, an eagle doesn't catch mice with a view to pardoning them. And even if we admit that an eagle can "pardon" a mouse, wouldn't it be better if he didn't interfere with it at all? Thirdly and lastly, eagle or super-eagle he is still a bird. So that the comparison with an eagle can scarcely be flattering even to a policeman.

As for my views on eagles now—here they are: eagles are eagles, that and nothing more, they are cruel and rapacious, although they have the excuse that nature herself created them expressly anti-vegetarian. And since, at the same time, they are strong, far-sighted, swift and merciless, naturally, their appearance puts the whole feathered kingdom to flight. Fear induces their victims to do this, not admiration, as alleged by the poets. Moreover, eagles avoid society, live in the most inaccessible places, are inhospitable, engage in plundering and, when not plundering, give themselves up to dozing.

* * *

Once, however, there was an eagle who became terribly bored with living all alone. So one day he said to his lady-eagle: "How dull it is, sitting all alone, with no other company but ourselves. Looking at the sun all day is fit to drive one mad."

The eagle began to brood. And the more he brooded, the more he began to think how wonderful it would be to live as the serf-owners of old lived. Why not gather a company of varlets and live like a lord? Let the crows bring him the latest gossip, the parrots turn somersaults, magpies cook porridge, horned owls, screech-owls and barn owls keep watch at night, and

hawks, falcons and vultures supply him with food. And he, the eagle, would devote himself to bloody tyranny. He thought and he thought and at last made up his mind. He summoned the falcon, the hawk and the vulture and said:

"Round up a retinue of varlets. Let them serve me and amuse me, and I'll keep them in fear. That's all."

The meat-eaters obeyed the command and flew off in all directions. They did their job in real earnest. First they rounded up a swarm of crows. They entered them in the census sheets and issued tax certificates. Now, the crow is a fruitful bird and readily agrees to anything. But her chief virtue is an uncommon aptitude for acting the bumpkin class. And anyone knows that if bumpkins, i.e., peasants, are at hand, all that is needed is to arrange a few details which, of course, is the easiest thing in the world. And the eagle's deputies did it. The loons and the landrails were mustered into a brass band, the parrots were dressed up as jesters, and the magpie, being a notorious thief, was entrusted with the keys of the treasury. Finally, the horned owls and screech-owls were put on sentry duty. In short, they got together a paradise that no gentleman would be ashamed of.... Even the cuckoo was not forgotten, but appointed chief soothsayer to the lady-eagle, while the cuckoo's offspring had a special orphanage built for them.

But the ménage was hardly in running order, when it was felt that something important had been left out. For a long time they wondered what it could be, until at last they hit on the missing clue. Every proper magnate should have the arts and science represented in his household, but the eagle's had neither.

Three birds in particular took this omission as a personal offence: the bullfinch, the woodpecker and the nightingale.

The bullfinch was a sharp little fellow and a born misinformer. He received his education at a school for soldiers' children and afterwards served in the army as a regimental clerk. Having tackled the rules of punctuation, he began to

publish an uncensored periodical entitled *The Woodland Herald.* Yet, try as he might, he somehow just couldn't fall in with official requirements. Either he touched on something forbidden, or he would omit a point which not only could but should have been mentioned. And naturally, he got rapped on the knuckles for this. And so he decided to take up service with the eagle, to sing the glory of his lordship, the eagle, each morning without running any risk.

The woodpecker was a humble scholar and lived a life of strict seclusion. He never saw anyone (many even thought that he drank as deep as all deep scholars), and sat on a pine-branch all day, pecking away. He'd pecked out a series of works on woodland history: "Goblin Genealogy," "Did Baba-Yaga the Witch Ever Wed?" "The Sex of a Sorceress and the Census," etc. But no matter how much he pecked, he couldn't find a publisher for his peckings. And so he, too, finally made up his mind to offer his services to the eagle as Courtyard Chronicler. Who knows, maybe the eagle would print his works (at the crows' expense, of course)?

As regards the nightingale, he could hardly complain of disappointment. His singing was always so sweet that the dumb pine-trees, to say nothing of the Moscow merchants, waxed sentimental upon hearing him. The whole world adored him and listened in breathless rapture as he poured forth his melody. But he was voluptuous and vainglorious beyond measure. It wasn't enough that he flooded the free woodlands with his song and filled stricken hearts with his melody. No, vain songster, he dreamt of the eagle himself adorning his neck with a ribbon of ants' eggs and decorating his bosom with live cockroaches. And the lady-eagle would appoint him moonlight rendezvous....

In a word, all three birds harassed the falcon to announce them to the eagle.

The eagle listened to the falcon's report on the need for installing the arts and science, but was slow in understanding.

He just sat mumbling, moving his talons in and out, his eyes glittering in the sun like polished stones. He had never seen a newspaper in his life; never gave a thought to witches and sorceresses, and knew the nightingale only as a small bird not worth soiling one's beak.

"I'll bet you don't even know that Bonaparte is dead," the falcon ventured.

"Bonaparte, who is he?"

"I told you so. Wouldn't be bad if you knew, though. Imagine that you're giving a ball and that someone says this or that happened during Bonaparte's time, and you just blink your eyes! Why, it wouldn't do at all."

The screech-owl was called in for counsel and she, too, advised introducing arts and science. The eagle's own life would be brighter, and then one should think in terms of prestige, too. "Learning is light, ignorance is darkness. Anyone can sleep and stuff his belly, but just try and count the number of geese in the flock—pretty awkward, not to be able to do so. Sensible serf-owners used to give two noodles for a scholar, and they had good reason for doing so! There, look at the siskin—the only science he knows is how to carry a pail, yet think of the money they pay to see it!"

"I see in the dark and am called wise for it, and you, although you can look at the sun for hours without blinking—you know what they say? 'The eagle's sharp, but his head is empty.'"

"Gerrumph! Very well! I'm not against science!" rasped the eagle.

No sooner said than done. Next day the eagle's household stepped into its "Golden Age." The blackbirds rehearsed the new anthem: *The Fruits of Science Feed the Young*, the loons and landrails practised in the band, the parrots learnt new tricks. Another tax was levied on the crows and called the "Education Tax"; young hawks and falcons were enrolled in cadet schools, the owls—into a new *Académie des sciences*, and even the baby crows received a copy of the penny alphabet each! Finally, the

eldest of the blackbirds was appointed poet-laureate and given the name of Vasili Kirillich Tredyakovsky,* and ordered to be ready for a contest with the nightingale by the next morning.

At last the long-awaited day arrived. The newly recruited scholars and men of arts were lined up before his eagleship and told to show off their talents.

The bullfinch was the biggest success. By way of salutation he read an article from the morning paper so fluently that even the eagle thought he understood it. Take life easy, the bullfinch read, and the eagle nodded: jusso! All that he ever wanted, said the bullfinch, was that his paper should sell well, and the eagle repeated: jusso! The flunkey's life is better than his master's, he chirped; the master has worlds of care, the flunkey none—the good master looks after them. Jusso! again said the eagle. They say that when he had a conscience he had no trousers, but now that it is dead he wears two pairs at once. And again the eagle came in with his jusso!

But at length the eagle got bored. "Next!" he snarled.

The woodpecker began by tracing the eagle's lineage from the sun. And here, too, the eagle chimed in—yes, he'd heard something like that from Papà. "The sun," said the woodpecker, "had three children: the Shark—a daughter—and two sons, the Lion and the Eagle. The Shark was dissolute, and the father exiled her to the bottom of the sea. The young Lion, too, turned away from his sire and was made lord of the desert. But the Eaglet was a dutiful son—so the father willed him a place near himself, to rule the heavens."

But the woodpecker had barely reached the end of the preface when the eagle lost patience: "Next! Who's next?"

It was now the nightingale's turn. But he came a cropper at the very first note. He sang of a servant's delight at God having sent him a master, of noble eagles that never grudged servants money for vodka. In a word, the nightingale did his best

* Tredyakovsky (1703-1769)—courtier, poet-laureate and scholar.—*Ed.*

to sing in the servile vein, but try as he would, the "art" that lived in him refused to be curbed. The bird himself was servile from beak to tail (he even picked up a second-hand necktie somewhere and curled his hair) but his "art" just could not be kept within the bounds of servility and broke through again and again. But no matter how much he sang the eagle didn't understand a thing.

"What's the fool making such a noise for?" at last cried the eagle.

"Call Tredyakovsky!"

Vasili Kirillich came at the first bidding. He took up the same slavish themes, but expressed them with such transparency that the eagle did nothing but repeat: jusso! In the end he presented the blackbird with an ants'-egg necklace. And he flashed his eyes at the nightingale: "Out with the rascal!"

That ended the nightingale's career. In the twinkling of an eye he was thrown into a hen-coop and sold to the Innkeeper of The Parting Friends in Zaryadye, where he sings to this day pouring sweet poison into the hearts of befuddled "meteors."

Nevertheless, the cause of education was not abandoned. The fledgling hawks and falcons stayed on at college: the *Académie des sciences* undertook to compile a dictionary and laboured halfway through the letter A; the woodpecker almost finished volume ten of his "Goblin Genealogy." But the third member of the intellectual trio lay low. From the very outset the bullfinch surmised that all this hubbub about education would come to a quick and merciless end. And his fears, apparently, were well grounded.

The point is that the owl and the hawk who had taken joint leadership of education made a gross blunder. They took it into their heads to teach grammar to the eagle himself. They used the phonetic method, by far the easiest, but for all their trouble, even after a year, he still wrote *igl* instead of *eagle* for his name. And of course, no self-respecting money-lender would accept a letter of promise thus signed.

But a still greater blunder was that like all tutors, neither one nor the other gave their pupil a breather. The owl dogged his footsteps, shouting out *bbb, kkk, zzz,* while the hawk unceasingly tried to impress on him that without the four rules of arithmetic one cannot divide one's booty.

"Suppose you've stolen ten goslings, bribed the policeman with two and eaten one, how many remain?" the hawk would ask reproachfully. The eagle, unable to think of an answer, kept silent. But his ire against the hawk mounted steadily.

Tension set in which was speedily used to advantage by intrigue. The ringleader of the conspiracy was the vulture, and he drew the cuckoo into it. The latter began whispering to the lady-eagle: "They'll drive his poor eagleship to death with their learning, mark my words!" Then, by joint efforts, they aroused "evil passions" in the falcon.

And so one morning at daybreak the eagle had barely opened his eyes when the owl, as was her wont, approached from behind and again started buzzing: *vvv, zzz, rrr.*

"Go 'way, you nuisance," the eagle growled mildly.

"Be pleased, your eagleship, to repeat after me: *bbb, kkk.*"

"Go 'way, I tell you!"

"*Ppp, kkk, sss!*"

On the instant the eagle whirled round and tore the unfortunate owl in two.

An hour later the unsuspecting hawk returned from his morning hunt.

"Here's an exercise for you!" he said. "The night's spoils come to forty pounds of meat. Now, if we divide them in two equal parts—one for you and the other for your servants—what will your share be?"

"The lot!" replied the eagle.

"Don't be silly," objected the hawk. "If it was all yours I wouldn't be asking you."

It was not the first time he had given such exercises, but this time the hawk's tone appeared unendurable. The eagle's blood

boiled at the thought of a serf daring to say *no* when he had said *yes*. And it's very well known that when an eagle's blood boils he is no longer able to distinguish pedagogics from rebellion. And so it was in this instance.

However, upon finishing with the hawk, the eagle announced: "The *Académie des sciences* will function as before!"

Once more the blackbirds chanted *The Fruits of Science Feed the Young*. But all realized that the Golden Age was drawing to a close. The sole prospect now was the descending darkness of ignorance, accompanied by its inevitable companions—dissension and strife.

Disturbances began with the coming into office of the hawk's successors—the falcon and the vulture. Since the rivals were preoccupied with their personal accounts the servants' needs were overlooked and gradually fell into neglect.

In less than a month not a trace remained of the recent Golden Age. The blackbirds became lazy, the brass band of the landrails went out of tune, the magpie pilfered all she could, and such arrears of taxes piled up on the crows that the authorities had to resort to flogging. Things went from bad to worse, until even the eagle and his lady began to receive rotten meat.

To vindicate themselves the falcon and the vulture joined hands temporarily and put all the blame on education. Science, they said, was, of course, beneficial, but only if applied at the proper time. After all, our grandsires did without it, and so could we.

And to prove that all the harm really lay in education they began to discover conspiracies, invariably such as involved at least a prayer-book or an elementary school reader. An interminable nightmare of searches, investigations and trials followed.

Suddenly, "Quit it!" thundered from on high. It was the voice of the eagle, which once and for all cut short the advancement of education. And the silence that gripped the domain was such that the whisperings of slander could be heard stealing over the face of the earth.

The first victim of the new policy was the woodpecker. He knew grammar, and that was grounds enough for condemnation.

"You know where to put punctuation marks?"

"Yes, sir, I do, and not only the usual ones, but even those employed in emergency, as inverted commas, dashes, parentheses; I put them with a clear conscience wherever they are needed."

"And can you distinguish masculine from feminine?"

"Yes, sir, even in the dark."

That sufficed. The woodpecker was put into irons and locked up in a hollow tree for the rest of eternity. But alas! In that self-same hollow next day he expired, eaten alive by the ants.

The woodpecker affair had hardly ended when a pogrom broke out in the *Académie des sciences*. But the screech-owls and the horned owls put up a staunch defence—being loath to part with their comfortable government flats. They averred that they were not so much concerned with spreading science as concealing it from evil eyes. But the vulture immediately parried by asking what was the good of science. The owls, unable to find an answer, were taken aback. For their failure they were sold by the piece to farmers who stuffed them and used them as scarecrows.

At the same time the penny alphabets were confiscated from the baby crows, mashed to a pulp and made into playing cards.

The subsequent events developed with break-neck speed. The screech-owls and horned owls were followed by the blackbirds, the landrails, parrots, siskins, and all the rest. Even the deaf woodcock was suspected of having "ideas," seeing that he spends the day in silence and the night in sleep.

The eagle's household grew bare. The only members remaining were himself and his mate, and of all the retinue—only the falcon and the vulture. And away in the distance was the motley swarm of crows, audaciously multiplying. And the more they multiplied, the greater became their arrears of taxes.

Then the falcon and the vulture, not knowing whom else to prey upon (the crows not counting), began to persecute one another. And all because of science. The falcon informed the police that the vulture secretly read a prayer-book, while the vulture let it be known that the falcon had the latest song-book hidden in a hollow.

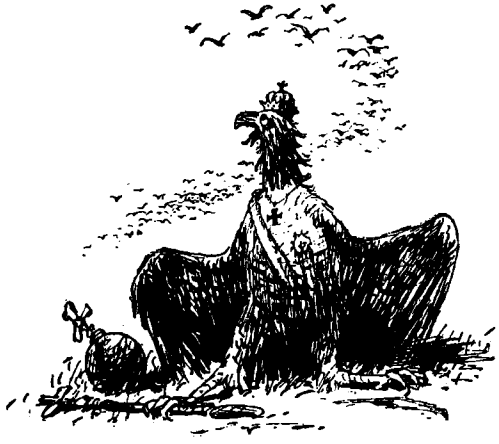
The eagle was in dismay. But at this juncture History itself took a big stride forward in order to put an end to the muddle. A thing unheard of took place. Seeing they were left on their own, the crows suddenly bethought themselves: "What does the penny alphabet say on this score?" And they hadn't time to remember properly, when, instinctively, the whole flock took wing and flew off.

The eagle dashed after them, but in vain. The blissful life of a country gentleman had made him so soft that his wings could barely flutter.

Then he turned to his lady-eagle and proclaimed:

"Let this be a lesson to all eagles!"

But what, in the circumstances, he meant by the word *lesson* —whether education was harmful for eagles or vice versa—was a point on which he offered no comment.



THE IDEALISTIC CRUCIAN

A crucian and a ruff had an argument. The crucian held that one could make a living honestly, while the ruff insisted that one couldn't avoid being *artful*. What he meant by artful remains unknown, but each time he said it, the crucian would exclaim indignantly:

"But that is disgusting!"

To which the ruff would answer:

"All right, we shall see!"

Now, the crucian is a peace-loving fish with an idealistic bent; no wonder it is a favourite with the monks. It lies for the most part at the bottom of creeks and ponds, buried in the slime in deserted places, picking out the microscopic shellfish which make up its bill of fare. And naturally, as it lies there hour after hour, it occasionally has thoughts, some of them

quite daring. But since crucians do not submit their thoughts to the censor or have them registered by the police, no one suspects them of being politically unreliable. Although we sometimes see raids on crucians, the reason is not that they are free-thinkers, but because they are good to eat.

As a rule crucians are caught with seines or draw nets, but success depends on skill. Experienced fishermen prefer to fish after rain, when the water is troubled. Having cast their nets, they beat the surface with sticks, rope-ends and what not, and in general make a lot of noise. Hearing the commotion and thinking that it heralds the triumph of liberal ideas, the crucian rises and begins to inquire if he, too, might take part. Whereupon he and his fellows get caught by the shoal and presently fall victims to human gluttony. For, I repeat, the crucian makes such a savoury dish (especially if fried in sour cream) that marshals of the nobility will serve it up before the Governor himself.

The ruff, on his part, is a fish already tainted with scepticism, and moreover, extremely prickly. Upon being cooked, however, it makes incomparable broth.

How it occurred that the crucian fell in with the ruff, I can't tell. Suffice it to say that having met they immediately began an argument. It happened once and it happened twice till finally they both got to like it so much that they made special appointments with each other. They would meet beneath a water burdock and exchange wise words, and the white-bellied roach would frisk around them and pick up wisdom.

The first word always lay with the crucian.

"I shall never believe," he would say, "that the development of every living thing is governed by the law of struggle and strife. I believe in peaceful, bloodless progress, I believe in harmony, and I am deeply convinced that happiness is not just the fruit of imagination, but will sooner or later be enjoyed by all."

"Fiddlesticks!" sneered the ruff.

The ruff is hot-headed and impetuous in argument, a nervous fish with a long memory for injuries. It's a bitter heart he has, oh how bitter! He has not got as far as misanthropy yet, but has long ago lost all faith and credulity. Everywhere instead of peace he sees dissension, instead of progress—universal barbarity. And anyone, he urges, who intends to survive must look reality straight in the face. The crucian he regards as "slightly too heady," but admits that he is the only living creature in whom one can confide.

"Fiddlesticks? No, indeed!" the crucian responded. "We'll all come to happiness by and by. The darkness in which we are now swimming is merely the outcome of tragic fortuity. But since modern science does away with fortuity, the sources that begot it are no longer irremovable. The age of darkness is now a thing of the past, while to light belongs the long-awaited future. And there will be light! Mark my words, there will!"

"Do you mean to say that a time will come when there won't be pikes?"

"What pikes?" the crucian inquired naively. Whenever he heard people say: "The pikes are in the sea so that crucians shouldn't dream," he regarded it as a fairy-tale, a bogey for frightening children, and of course never feared it very much.

"Ah, fool, fool! Trying to put the world right, and doesn't even know what pikes are!" And with a contemptuous shake of his fins the ruff would swim away. But after a while they would meet in a lonely nook (it's quite dull enough in the water) and resume the discussion.

"Good is the predominant factor in life," the crucian would expostulate. "As for evil, it is due to a misunderstanding. The principal life force is good."

"Rubbish!"

"Ah, ruff, what improper expressions you use! 'Rubbish!' What kind of answer is that?"

"You know what, crucian? You don't deserve an answer at all, really. You're just a silly nincompoop, that's all."

"But wait a minute, ruff. Let me have my say. Evil has never been a creative force. Even history tells us that. Evil has stifled, suppressed, destroyed, has given things to fire and sword, whereas good, and good alone, has been a life-giving force. Good hastened to aid the oppressed, broke their chains, inspired noble emotions and stimulated all flights of genius. Without this veritably life-giving agency there would be no such thing as history. For what, in truth, is history? The epic of emancipation, the story of the triumph of good and reason over evil and unreason!"

"You seem to be quite positive that evil and insanity have been vanquished."

"No, not yet, but vanquished they shall be—of that I am certain. And here I again may call history to witness. Compare the past with the present: you will readily agree that not only the outward forms of evil have softened, but that the very sum of evil has diminished. Take ourselves, for instance. Formerly they used to catch us any old time, for the most part during the spring migrations, when we ourselves jumped insanely straight into the nets. But today—nothing of the kind. Today they acknowledge that migration time is the time we shouldn't be caught. In the past they destroyed us by most barbarous means. I've heard say that when they harpooned fish in the River Ural the water was red for miles. But not now, sir, no! Nothing of the sort. Seines, fishing-rods and draw nets—that's the only tackle allowed. Why, they even discuss it in committees; what kind of nets, at what time of the year, for what purposes. . . ."

"You seem to be jolly particular about the way you land in a frying-pan."

"A what?" queried the crucian.

"Bless my soul! A crucian and hasn't heard of pans. And you dare to argue with me after that! In order to argue, to defend

your point of view you should at least know the subject. Why argue when you don't even know such simple truths as that there's a frying-pan waiting for every crucian? Clear off, now, or I'll run you through!"

And the ruff would bristle all over with his spikes, while the crucian sank to the bottom as fast as his clumsiness allowed. But next day the friendly foes would meet again and begin a new argument.

"The other day the pike had a look at our creek," the ruff informed the crucian.

"The one you spoke about the day before?"

"Yes, sir, that same. She swam about, looked around and muttered: 'H'm! seems a bit too quiet here. Must be a tidy lot of crucians about.' "

"Well, what do you suggest I do?"

"Be ready, that's all. Wait till she comes and goggles at you—then tuck up your fins and scales and jump right in—down her throat, that is."

"But why? After all, I'm not guilty of anything...."

"You're stupid, that's your trouble, too fat for brains. Does not the law say that the fat and the stupid must jump down the pike's throat?"

"There's no such law," cried the highly indignant crucian. "The pike has no right to gobble me up just like that. She should let me explain first. Just wait till she sees me. I'll tell her the whole truth. Yes, the truth—and nothing but the truth."

"I've told you before that you're an ass and I'll say it again. Ass you were, are and always will be."

At this point the ruff would fly into a rage and promise himself to have no communion with the crucian in future. But a few days after the force of habit would prevail.

"Now, if only we fish could agree among ourselves..." the crucian would begin mysteriously.

But at this even the ruff became ruffled. "My God, what's that fool going to talk about?" he thought. "You never can tell

what he'll blurt out next. And there's chub on the prowl here—looking the other way, the hound, as if it were no business of his—but he's listening his hardest."

"Don't let your tongue go loose, be careful what you say!" he persuaded the crucian. "Don't open your mouth too wide. You can just as well whisper what you have to say."

"No, I shall *not* whisper," the crucian continued blandly. "I'll say it aloud. If all fish agreed among themselves...." But here the ruff would break in rather roughly. "Bah! It takes a good dinner to stand your chattering!" he snapped, then turned about and paddled off. He was annoyed and yet sorry for the crucian. Stupid though he was, the crucian was the only fellow you could trust. He would never blab, never give you away—who is blessed with such gifts nowadays? The times we live in are not up to much—one can't trust even one's mother and father. The roach, for instance—there's nothing particularly bad about him, and yet one has to be on the alert when talking with them—they're liable to blurt something out unawares. As for chub, ide, tench and other riff-raff, it goes without saying. Give them a worm and they'll swear on the Bible against you. Poor crucian, he'll perish all for nothing among that lot.

"Just take a look at yourself, crucian," the ruff said. "Now what defence could you put up if occasion demanded? Your belly is big and your head is small and none too apt at devising anything. As for your mouth—it's hardly worth talking about. Even the scales on your back are only fit to laugh at. You've got no speed and no vigour—you're just clumsy, that's all. It's just anyone could come along and eat you!"

"But why should I be eaten, when I haven't done any harm?" said the crucian, stubborn as ever.

"Listen, you foolish fish! Is anyone eaten for his faults? We're just eaten because somebody wants to eat. Understand? You yourself find it necessary to eat, don't you? You don't poke your nose in the mud for nothing; you do it to catch the shellfish,

eh? They want to live, too, but you, you fat-head, come along and stuff your belly with them from morning till night. Now, you just tell me, what have they done that you punish them so every minute? Why, remember what you were saying the other day? 'What if all the fish agreed among themselves?' Now then, what if all the shellfish laid a plot against you? Wouldn't you be pleased, you blockhead!"

The question was put with such embarrassing directness that the crucian was quite dismayed and even blushed.

"Well, the shellfish.... But they're only..." he stammered confusedly.

"Shellfish are shellfish, and crucians are crucians. Shellfish are munched up by crucians, and crucians by pike. Neither shellfish nor crucians are guilty of anything, and yet they both must suffer. Think about that for ages if you want, but you'll never come to anything else."

On hearing these words the crucian buried himself in the thickest ooze and thought deep thoughts. He thought and he thought, and all the while he kept munching and munching shellfish. And the more he munched the more he wanted. At last, however, an idea struck him.

"No, ruff, I don't eat shellfish because they are guilty. You are right in that," he explained. "It's because nature herself intended them to be my food."

"Where did you get that from?"

"I came to that conclusion myself. The shellfish have no souls—only steam. You eat them and they don't even know it. And then, they're so constructed you just can't help swallowing them. You draw in the water with your mouth and straightway your maw is chock-full of them. I don't catch them deliberately—they sort of cram into my mouth by their own volition. But crucians—that's a different matter. There are crucians a whole foot long, if you want to know. Eating such a whopper is no joke. He's got to do something real bad—then, of course...."

"Wait till a pike swallows you, then you'll see what you've got to do for it. Better keep quiet till then."

"No, I won't! Although I've never seen a pike in my life I gather from what I've heard that she is not deaf to the voice of truth. Tell me now, I beg you, how could one even imagine such wickedness—a crucian is lying in the mud, doing no harm to anyone, and all of a sudden—for no reason whatever, he suddenly lands in a pike's belly! I can't believe it, and I won't."

"Silly ass! Did you see the monk this morning pulling out a whole netful of you fellows? Was it just to have a look at them, d'you think?"

"I know nothing about that, but it's by no means certain what has happened to them since, whether they've been eaten or just put into a pond. Perhaps they feel even better there than you and I feel here, with all the monastery titbits thrown to them."

"Well then, booby, go and live there yourself!"

Day followed day, but there seemed to be no end to these arguments. The place they lived in was so quiet, it was even covered with green slime on the surface—the best place in the world for arguing. No matter what you talked or dreamed of, you were sure of impunity. This fact lent such zest to the crucian that with every bout of argument the pitch of his excursions into the realm of ideal rose higher and higher.

"We fishes should love one another," he harped, "all should stand for each and each for all—that would be real harmony!"

"I'd like to see you preaching that love of yours to the pike," said the ruff, trying to sober him.

"I'll find a way, don't worry," the crucian persisted. "I know a word or two that'll turn any pike into a crucian."

"Go ahead, let's have them!"

"Well, I'll simply ask the pike if she has any notion of virtue, and of the obligations it imposes on us in relation to our fellows."

"Dear me, that's a stunner, to be sure! I've a good mind to slit your belly for those words!"

"Oh no, please, stop such jokes!"

Or he would start like this:

"Only when we fish are brought up from our earliest years in the spirit of citizenship will we be conscious of our rights."

"What on earth do you want with the spirit of citizenship?"

"Well, anyhow. . . ."

"Yes, 'anyhow,' that's just it. Civic sentiment is good only when you're able to apply it. And how will you apply it in this blessed mud?"

"Well, I need it not only in the mud, but in general. . . ."

"For example?"

"Why, for instance, if a monk wants to broil me in a saucepan, I'll pop up and say: you've got no right, holy father, to put me to such torture without trial."

"And he'll pop you in the frying-pan or straight on hot coals for your cheek. No, my dear fellow, living in this mud you need not civic, but silly fool's sentiments—better say that. Hide away as deep as you can and keep silent, you ninny!"

Or: "Fish shouldn't feed on their like," the crucian would begin his daydreaming. "Nature has quite enough choice dishes for our pleasure. Shellfish, flies, worms, spiders, water fleas, and then, snakes, lobsters, frogs—all of them good, all of them nourishing."

"And crucians, are they not good for pikes?"

"Oh no, the crucian's quite a different case. Seeing that nature has provided him with no means of defence, such as you have, for instance, a special law should be passed for his protection."

"And what if this law should be ignored?"

"Why, then a suitable admonition should be published, something like this: 'Better no laws at all than have them disobeyed.'"

"And that, you think, will be enough?"

"I believe that many would be shamed."

So, as I have said, day followed day, and still the crucian

persisted in his nonsense. Another would have got knocked on the nose for it, but he went unpunished. And I am sure that his tongue would have wagged until doomsday had he but taken the least precaution. Unfortunately, he became so conceited that he lost his head altogether. And then one fine morning a chub swam up to him with a summons: her ladyship the pike will favour these waters with a visit. "So be ready at six sharp tomorrow to give answer, Mr. Crucian."

The crucian, however, was not a whit dismayed. On the one hand, he had heard so many different stories about the pike that he was curious to make her acquaintance. Then, there was his magic word—he had only to utter it and the biggest brute of a pike would turn into the meekest of crucians.

The ruff, observing this confidence, began to wonder if he hadn't gone too far in his negations. What if it were true that the pike was only waiting to be loved, to be counselled, to have her heart and mind enlightened? Perhaps she's really kind-hearted. And the crucian, too, maybe he wasn't the simpleton that he looked, but a cold, calculating careerist. Perhaps he'll approach the pike and astound her with the first truth she's ever heard. And—who knows?—the pike might say: "Now, crucian, for speaking the truth, I put you in charge of these waters."

Next morning, true to her word, the pike came swimming along. And the crucian thought as he gazed at her: "What nonsense they've spoken about her. She's just a plain fish like the rest of us. Except, perhaps, that she grins from ear to ear, and her throat is just wide enough for a crucian to slip down."

"It has reached my ears," said the pike, "that you, crucian, are a very wise fish and a marvellous orator. I want to have an argument with you. So go ahead."

"Happiness is what I'm thinking of mostly," said the crucian with a modest, but dignified air. "Not happiness for me alone, but happiness for all, so that all fish should be able to swim freely in any water. And if one should choose the mud, he should be free to wallow in it to his heart's content."

"H'm. And you think that such a state of affairs is possible?"

"I do, and what is more, I expect to see it come about any hour."

"Imagine . . . say, myself, for instance, swimming alongside a crucian!"

"Well, why not?"

"First time I hear it. And supposing I turn round, say, and eat him?"

"There is no such law, Your Highness. The law says plainly: shellfish, flies, gnats and mites shall serve for piscine sustenance. Later amendments have added the following thereto: water fleas, spiders, worms, beetles, frogs, lobsters, and other water-dwellers. But not fish."

"That's far from enough for me. There, chub! Is there really such a law?"

"Out of date, Your Highness," replied that ingenious official.

"I thought as much. Such a law is unthinkable. Well, crucian, what else do you expect any hour?"

"In addition, I expect that justice shall triumph, and the strong no longer oppress the weak, nor the rich oppress the poor. That a community will be founded in which every fish will have its place and do his or her part. You, pike, being the strongest and cleverest of all, will have a more important job, while I, the crucian, will do something more modest, in accordance with my humbler capacities. Each for all and all for each—that's how it will be. If we fish stand up for one another, no one will ever bait us. The draw net will still be a long way off when we scamper for shelter—under stones or tree-roots, in holes or in the mud—each as he finds best. They will just have to forget about fish soup!"

"I wouldn't be too sure about that. People are loath to forget things that taste well. But anyhow, even if it should happen, nobody knows when. Now, sir, what I would like to ask is this: you seem to imply that I shall have to work, too?"

"Yes, just like everybody else."

"First time I've heard it. Go and have a sleep, my lad!"

Did he sleep or not, nobody knows. At any rate the next time they met he was none the wiser. At midday he again came before the pike to continue the dispute, not only fearless, but more cheerful than ever.

"So I'm to work and you're to reap the fruits?" the pike asked bluntly.

"Each enjoys the fruits of all the others, of our common labour, that is."

"I see, I see.... Each shares the fruit of the others ... that, I suppose, includes mine. H'm. I'm beginning to think that your speeches are not quite so harmless. Chub! What do they call such talk nowadays?"

"Sishilism, Your Highness!"

"I knew it! I've been hearing for a long time about the crucian inciting sedition. I thought I'd just listen to him myself. So that's the kind of fish you are!"

And the pike swished her tail in such an expressive manner that, simple though he was, the crucian understood it.

"I didn't mean any harm, Your Highness!..." he mumbled in confusion. "It's just my simplicity."

"All right, all right. Simplicity, they say, is worse than robbery. If fools are left at large, they'll worry the lives out of sensible people. I've heard a lot about you, Mister, but now I see that you are just a plain crucian—nothing special. We've been talking barely five minutes, and yet I'm bored to death."

The pike fell to musing and eyed the crucian so queerly that at last he understood everything. But the pike, apparently, was full after the gorging of the day before, for she yawned languorously and the next minute was snoring.

This time, however, the crucian didn't get away with it. The moment the pike fell asleep, he was surrounded by chubs and taken into custody.

No sooner had the sun set than the crucian was brought for his third dispute with the pike, but this time under guard and

displaying diverse injuries; during the interrogation the perch had bitten out a piece of his back and snapped off part of his tail.

But he was not down-hearted for he still had his magic word.

"Although you are an enemy of mine," the pike began; "I just can't live without disputes. So go ahead, fellow, begin."

At these words, the crucian's heart suddenly caught fire. On the instant, pulling in his belly, quivering and flapping what was left of his tail, he looked the pike straight in the eyes and with all his power cried:

"Do you know the meaning of virtue?"

The pike, astonished, gaped wide. Mechanically, she drew in the water, and without the slightest desire to do so, swallowed the crucian.

The fishes who had witnessed the event were dumbfounded but immediately recovered and hurried to the pike to inquire if she had supped well and not choked. And the ruff, who had long foreseen and foretold everything, swam forward and solemnly declared:

"That is how they end, our disputes!"

THE SISKIN'S CALAMITY

A canary was given in marriage to a siskin, and the wedding they had was splendid. At a shop called "Work and Play" they bought a toy wooden church; the Pastor was a learned bullfinch; starlings sang the bridal songs, and to keep order the police superintendent sent a detachment of sparrow hawks. Well-nigh all the birds of the forest came to have a look at the young couple, and there were quite a few honoured guests, too. The chaffinch acted as best man for the siskin, while the nightingale was bridesmaid for the canary. The vulture himself hinted that he would like to give the bride away, but the parents found a polite excuse to decline the honour and, instead, invited the deaf heath cock who as long ago as the reign of King Peasecod had been given a seat in the Senate owing to his senility and loss of memory.

The young couple, the parents and the wedding guests thoroughly enjoyed themselves; the siskin, proud as a peacock, anticipated his bliss; the canary preened her feathers with her dainty beak, the parents said: "Thank goodness, that's one daughter off!" while the guests dreamed of the piles of hemp-seed, pickled gnats and sugared flies they would demolish at the wedding feast. Only the ill-omened crow cawed out of tune: "No good will come of this marriage! No good! No good!"

Although among humans the crow is deemed stupid, the birds know that when she caws she has weighty reasons for doing so. And sure enough, the moment her cawing died away, the cuckoo called out: "Cuckoo! What if the ill-omened bird proves right?" Then, after the cuckoo the blue tit, the red-tail, the peewit, all began chirping to the same effect.

All present fixed their eyes on the young couple, and began to observe, recall and remember. They turned to the private history of the two beings united a moment ago with an inseverable bond, recounted their inclinations, tastes and habits. And, as is usual in such cases, the result was picturesque.

The siskin, so they said, was a good-natured, simple fellow, and had three main characteristics: he was most unpretentious, very neat and a born family man. Moreover, he was no longer young, although he had not yet given up the hope that in case of need he could fend for himself. All his life he had served in the Commissariat Department, where he reached the rank of major; there, too, it was that he had bred his intellect and heart. He did not take bribes (the rapacious reign had ended), and yet by diverse shady practices had amassed a tidy fortune. He once got a bargain in the shape of a consignment of canary seed, and it was then that it had first occurred to him: "What if I marry a canary and feed her and the children on this seed!" He had lost his mother and father while still a fledgling, inherited no legacy, and, because of this, was never loath to swagger that he owed his respectability to no one but

himself. Even the art of carrying a tiny pail of water had been self-taught.

Such were the mental and moral features of the bridegroom. To be sure, there was nothing especially prepossessing about him, but from the legal point of view, as a loyal subject, he left nothing to be desired.

There was nothing brilliant or striking in his appearance; on the contrary, it was extremely plain, almost humdrum. How the sparrows used to laugh when, desirous of paying a young lady a compliment, he would shake his coat-tails and roll his eyes. And his compliments, too, were uninteresting, as a rule accompanied by some ancient Commissariat anecdote, or by boasts that no matter how little a cabman charged him, he always paid five kopeks less, or even went on foot if there was time.

"So now, thank God," he would conclude, "I can support myself and bring up a family besides."

Parents were delighted with such sentiments and tried so hard to catch him in their toils that once they nearly choked him. But the daughters nicknamed him "Commissariat cholera" and scattered as soon as he appeared, although their mammas commanded them "Restez!" But he, far from being offended with these girlish tricks, would even comfort the parents, saying:

"Never mind, ma'am, never mind. I am used to it. It's the usual thing with girls. I knew a little wagtail at the Commissariat Department, a real beauty, I can tell you. From her, too, at first, I heard nothing but 'hee-hee' and 'ha-ha.' 'Let us become acquainted, Miss,' I would say to her, and she would reply: 'Go your way, you nasty Major!' Well, in short, I made after her, she ran from me, darting this way and that. But at last I found her! In the end, let me tell you, she praised me highly."

"Dear me," said the parents banteringly, "what a wag you are, Ivan Ivanovich! You haven't, by chance, any love-children?"

"I cannot say for certain, ma'am; I wouldn't vouch for it, since I have paid due tribute to natural weaknesses in my time. If you want my opinion it is this: one should not allow excess, but if in moderation, well, why not have some pleasure? It's the same with vodka, I don't drink myself blind, but I don't object to a glass, now and then."

He had left his office a little while ago. "Had enough, sir." His wants were moderate and the tidy fortune God had sent him while at work, well, he had been thrifty with it. Ordinary interest was quite enough for him, what with compound interest he would simply not know what to do with the money.

"I get my clothing free," he used to say, "and all else that God has ordained me, too, including food. And if I want amusement, I can get that cheap, too. All I have to do is warble, and there it is. There are plenty of flies in the world, and spiders, and worms, and such fare, and so long as I have strength to catch them I am provided for. And should my strength fail me, well, I'll just die. So what? That's the fate of all birds."

If, while at the office his cherished dreams were of domestic delights, samovar; dressing-gown, double bed and other such ideals fostered in the Commissariat Department (what is a bachelor-siskin, sir? a medical term, nothing more), upon resigning such thoughts had obsessed him more and more. So, having chosen a little yellow canary, he donned his uniform, fastened his spurs (a retirement present) and set off to the parents of his intended to ask for her hand.

For the first time in his life exaltation took hold of him. For the first time, too, he sang "As I was walking down the street," and didn't sing flat. The passion for the beautiful canary so completely engrossed him that, contrary to his usual caution, he quite omitted to inquire what kind of bird his bride was and whether she had a dowry.

And perhaps this last would have been no idle precaution,

the bride being a cultivated young lady and accustomed to good society. She liked to have her little airs and graces, and to dress.... She sang "*Si vous n'avez rien à me dire*," played "*Le Ruisseau*" on the music-box and felt unstrung if she had no young men fussing around her. She might have been kind at heart, but she never had time, nor opportunity to show it. They would bring the latest fashions from the shops, or her brothers' friends in the cadet school would pay a visit. And so, with her sundry occupations, she never grew aware of her own kindness.

"Mademoiselle, would you mind if I kissed your pretty foot?" one of the besieging cadets would say to her.

"Oh, you are so.... Well, kiss it then."

And that was that.

Her parents were society people too, and like her, too, were fond of good company. Her father had been Marshal of the Nobility in Canary Gubernia for fifteen years, had squandered four legacies and sold the last of his serf-certificates a year ago. And now he existed on petty speculations at which he was expert; so much so, that he would even give cabmen the slip by dodging through courtyard passages. And Mamma, as she had been a canary in youth, so she remained in old age. She hopped from perch to perch, in pursuit of gentlemen canaries and still kept sad memories of how, when Marshaless, she had eaten cream biscuits, and the peacock, then Governor, had unfurled his tail at her sight. In the same spirit she had brought up her eldest daughter.

"I never even thought of sending her to the University," she declared to the siskin when he proposed. "I think it quite sufficient if a young lady knows French and how to hop from perch to perch, to dress becomingly and entertain guests. That is quite, quite enough for a woman's happiness."

"You acted correctly, ma'am," said the siskin, "in bringing up your daughter in the fear of God. The male sex, to be sure, should have some knowledge of geography; you never know

when, or where, the authorities may send you on a mission. But as for a young lady, any gentleman will be delighted to show her the way. All she needs is not to be led astray."

"Oh dear no, Major, you can be absolutely sure about that. My daughter is such a good, prudent little darling, even if she found herself in the midst of a forest with an Uhlan she would come to no harm."

"So I hope, ma'am."

Apart from the trio already described, the family included a younger daughter and two sons. The younger daughter had more of a fledgling jackdaw in her than a canary—they even called her Galochka, too (the name of the eldest was Proserpinochka). The parents regarded her as a sort of Cinderella. She was a kindly soul, devoted to her family and cheerful, and in spite of the fact that everyone ordered her about, treated her as a servant and grudged her every bit she ate, she had a warm affection for her parents, her sister and her brothers. The only thing that caused her to weep when she was alone was that her household duties never left her time to attend lectures at the University. As for her brothers, the eldest was a cadet in an Uhlan regiment and was always failing in his scripture exams, while the younger attended college and couldn't understand why the authorities wanted him to know Greek.

"Mamma, what good can that oafish language be to me?" he complained. "Now Latin, there would be some sense in that. *Mons, parturiens mus... mus, muris, mons montis; parturio, parturivi, parturire....* Certainly it might come in handy say for writing prescriptions, quoting, or for peppering a leading article. But Greek! What do I want Greek for?"

"Perhaps it improves one's behaviour," suggested the matron.

"Oh, Mamma!"

All day long there was running to and fro in the house—guests coming and going, meals and parties. They hopped gaily from perch to perch, singing and playing the music-box.

Canary seed, wormseed, chopped egg yolk were never off the table, and this in spite of their being in debt at the grocer's for these six months past. The old canary turned somersaults and twisted like an eel on a frying-pan, trying to make ends meet. Every morning he visited his acquaintances; to one he would say that an aunt had just died, and he needed cash to get the legacy; to another that coal had been discovered on his estate but it could not be worked without capital, while to a third he would plainly declare that he was desperately hard up. Sometimes, he would even approach one of his cadet visitors and say: "Have a twenty-kopek piece on you, young man? You can have it back tomorrow, and I'd be most grateful!" The cadets paid up, but they'd have their fun, too. A crowd of them would fly in, Uhlans and cadets and what not, corner Proserpinochka and twirl their moustaches. And poor little Galochka, seeing the awful danger threatening her sister, would cry her eyes out.

This, then, was the family which the siskin had determined to join. Any of the neighbours could have told him that the old canary was bankrupt, that only the other day Mamma Canary had been seen in the bushes whispering with thrush, the money-lender, that Proserpinochka herself, on the pretext of taking singing lessons, had made daily flights to the nightingale, and afterwards—so people said—had laid a wind egg.... But the siskin, seemingly, had become deaf and blind. Having gained the consent of the parents, he in his joy flew from tree to tree, hoping to catch sight of his betrothed bathing in a bird-bath, and when his eyes did light on her, he would burst into song. He sang in shrill, false notes, but sad though it was he had no better means of thanking the Creator for the blessings that were about to be his.

"I know and I feel," he warbled, "that the grace vouchsafed me is more than my rank entitles me to, but I shall do all in my power to be worthy of it!"

But to do justice to Proserpinochka, she made no attempt to

conceal her indifference to the siskin. When her parents informed her of the honour bestowed on her by the Major, and added that they had already given their consent, she burst into noisy hilarity.

"Oh, Mamma, how frightfully droll he is!"

And then, when the parents purposely left them alone to become better acquainted with each other, instead of exchanging compliments, they launched into a rather prosaic dialogue.

"Are you stingy?" Proserpinochka asked.

"Not stingy, Miss, but thrifty," the siskin replied. "My idea is this: if you have enough money there is no need to throw it about. But if it would please you I am ready to change my attitude."

After that the Major gallantly clicked his heels, but alas! the gesture not only failed to move Proserpinochka, but on the contrary, evoked a fresh burst of merriment.

"Oh dear, how amusing you are when you click your heels! Do it again! Yes, like that! Ha-ha-ha! Well, and what do you eat at home? Something quite nasty, I suppose?"

"For my own part, I eat what the Lord sends me—simple but wholesome food.... But I will get canary seed for you."

"Oh no, salad is my favourite."

"Salad? I can get you that without any trouble; just fly into a kitchen garden early in the morning and pick some. Others would pay God knows how much for it, but I'd get it for you for nothing."

"Well then, and what will you give me for a wedding present? I saw some latest-fashion laces the other day, straight from Paris. What would you say to buying some for me?"

"With pleasure. I'll order the spider to have them ready first thing in the morning."

"Yes, but the laces I have in mind are very expensive."

"Never mind the expense, Miss. When the spider comes for the money I'll just swallow him and we'll be quits."

"Dear me, how droll you are!"

And so the conversation went on. It was never "darling," or "pet," just "awfully droll!" and that's all. The saucy canary became more and more impudent. She spent very little time with her betrothed, surrounding herself with cadets and students, with whom she whispered all day in the most shameless manner.

"Do you know, Major, what they are saying about you?" she said one day straight to his face. "They say that in the last war you supplied the Army and Navy with rotten biscuits."

He was dismayed, of course, but he did not have the heart to deny the charge, for although biscuits were not in his line at the time, his conscience wasn't quite clear: he used to supply "queer" hay for the cavalry, and that was perhaps even worse, for the men could at least complain, but the horses couldn't....

Ah, how badly he had behaved then!

Sometimes the girl made a fool of him before the whole company. The young people would be playing catch as catch can and "the nuisance," of course, would be hanging around. So they would make him take part in the game and blindfold him. He would spread his wings and make a dash for them, but she and her cadet friends would hide in the bushes. They would peep out, the knaves, and shout: "Catch as catch can, Major!" until the Major bumped against a pine-tree.

At first the old canary feared that he might take offence, and shouted now and then at her daughter: "*Finissez!*" But afterwards when she saw that the effect on the Major was like water on a duck's back, she gave up and merely asked him regularly every evening: "Do you happen to have a ruble, Major? You can have it back tomorrow, we'd be most grateful."

Galochka alone pitied the unfortunate siskin, and who knows, maybe there was another feeling in her heart, softer than pity? At any rate one evening, as the Major was flying home at a leisurely pace, Galochka overtook him.

"Now, tell me the truth: is it meet that you should love such a butterfly? Marry me instead. I would look after you so well!"

But the Major was deaf to her approaches. He refused even to listen properly, and answered rudely:

"If I wanted to marry a jackdaw, I would propose to one. But since I have made a proposal to your sister it should be clear that it is her I want."

And yet it would be wrong to say he saw nothing. On the contrary, he saw much and saw clearly. But he knew that he was a finished man, and that his fate had been decided once and for all. Why for all, he could not have told himself, but merely repeated: "Once and for all; once and for all!"

And so he got married. The wedding was followed by a carousal, and only late in the night did the siskin repair to his nest with his youthful consort. It was wonderful, wonderful and glorious! The night was warm and fragrant, the stars in the deep blue sky glittered like diamonds, and the siskin burned as if on fire. A blissful sensation glowed in his veins, a wonderful, intoxicating feeling. He knew not whether to sing or to sob, yet a sensitive delicacy made him restrain his desire. Proserpinochka, too, seemed affected by his passion. Languorously she closed her pretty eyelids and, with a delicious tremor passing through her frame, gave him a little peck on the top of his head. But just at that moment a drunken procession filed past the siskin's nest—her brothers and a crowd of tipsy companions. With hoots and howls they chanted: "Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre." At the sound of their voices the bride was instantly transformed. Just as she was, in déshabillé, she rushed out to the door and remained there until late cock-crow, giggling with the cadets. The siskin, putting on his uniform, went out, too, and stood behind his wife, trying to make merry also. But alas! he was very soon to realize that carousing is quite alien to one in the rank of major. In spite of all the siskin's efforts, his gravity and advancing years combined got the better of him. He could not keep his eyes open, and in a mo-

ment his loud snoring had filled the hollow. Even the burst of laughter that followed failed to rouse him. And in this fashion —fast asleep with uniform buttoned to the neck—he spent his wedding night.

From then on he lost the last remnants of his wife's esteem.

And when he awoke, although it was still early, there was no Proserpinochka to be found. The little linnet he had hired as a maid declared that "*Miss* Proserpine had gone home to her mother, without saying whether she would be back for dinner or not." "*Miss* Proserpine"—the words came to the siskin like a cold shower....

He poked out his head and hopped on to the nearest branch. A dead silence gripped the forest, the silence that precedes the dawn when all nature seems lifeless. The birds were still sleeping; even the leaves were motionless. But the East was reddening, and it seemed to the siskin that rosy-fingered Aurora was making a long nose at him in mock greeting. Apparently, something of the gravest import had happened in his life, something that fell like a huge, ineffaceable blot on the whole of his future existence. He had had a certain duty to perform—a simple one, to be sure, and quite natural to every siskin—and he, like a wicked and slothful slave, had neglected it.

And then, as he began to analyze his dreadful situation, he cheated at the very first step. Or, to put it scientifically, he examined the case from the viewpoint of its origin. Was this lapse of duty caused by a reason within his control? "If I myself am the real cause of this mishap, then there's nothing more to be said. If I am guilty, here's my head. But in all justice, there is not a shadow of blame on my part—and yet look what has happened, now!" But the moment he made up this excuse he instantly realized its futility. There are facts to which the laws of causation do not apply. Their occurrence is simply inevitable, and no amount of sophistry can bring into being that which *should have been* and *was not.* Not one young husband, not one loving mother, nor jury, to say noth-

ing of a Crown Court, would bring in any verdict other than "Shame, shame, shame!"

He should have beaten off the assault of the drunken company, he should have made his nest impregnable, with his own breast he should have shielded his right to fulfil his "duty," yes, and in the name of that duty, he should have entered into mortal combat.... "*Qu'il mourût!*"

"Shame, sir," he echoed mechanically, and mechanically, without even changing his uniform, with empty stomach, dishevelled as he was, he flew off *there.*

The old canary was already wide awake, the very picture of fury. In addition to the *shame* that her dear Proserpinochka had suffered that night, a canary cousin had come to visit her from three-times-nine lands away, and the tales she told supplied the last drop. She, too, had given her Milochka in marriage to a bullfinch, but oh dear me, what a difference!

"What a husband he is to Milochka," the visitor crooned. "How he loves her! *C'est tout un poème...* Just imagine..."

Here she bent down to her cousin's ear, whispered something, and then, with delighted horror, leant back, repeating:

"Imagine my Milochka's amazement!"

The old canary could only grate her beak as she listened.

"Well, well, God grant your Milochka... God grant her..." she muttered. "Ah, to think how some people can be happy! And we.... The joy your Milochka gets from her husband! And ours.... No one would call Proserpinochka scraggy.... So plump and lively, and her cheeks, and her breast.... And what do you think? the scoundrel didn't so much as notice them!"

"*Est-ce possible?*"

At that moment the siskin made his appearance. Just as he opened his mouth to speak in his own defence, the outraged mother-in-law, pointing to the door, screamed:

"*Sortez!* Shame, sir! Shame, shame, shame!"

And her cousin took up the cry:

"Shame, shame, shame!"

The siskin was dumbfounded. He wanted to fly away, anywhere, but his wings were limp, as if broken. He stumbled along the path leading to his nest, intending to hide his shame there, but the birds were already awake and knew everything. And although not one of them said anything "suitable to the occasion" to his face, and some even offered congratulations, he could see written clearly in all eyes: "Shame! Shame! Shame!"

In the evening, however, Proserpinochka returned, and without even saying *bon jour* flew straight into her nest.

"Dearest! Darling! Angel!" the Major warbled, and so plaintively, that even the linnet, low-born though she was, was moved to tears.

But Proserpinochka said never a word. All the Major heard was the rustle of her dainty feet gathering up the down on her couch in preparation for the night.

"My wife, my God-given wife!" pleaded the Major, his voice more a howl than a warble, and began to weep.

But even this mournful appeal failed to move her. He approached her bed and bent over her, but she was already sleeping or rather pretending to.

And so this night, too, the Major whiled away alone. He took off his coat, of course, but did not dare take off his trousers for fear of embarrassing Proserpinochka. And next morning, too, early as he got up, Proserpinochka had already flown to her parents.

And so the Major's martyrdom began.

For a whole month his young spouse never exchanged a word with him. Each night she returned to the nest, went to bed on her couch, and each morning vanished so swiftly and so mysteriously that the Major could never catch her going out. Four or five times she returned, accompanied by a crowd of cadets and students, summoned the linnet and ordered a

sumptuous supper. She and her company ate and drank before the siskin's eyes in the most shameful manner, never even gracing him with a thank you and with no more regard to him than if he were a watchman or something and not the lawful proprietor of the hollow. In his wife's family, too, he was invariably referred to as "that scoundrel."

"The scoundrel has bought another lottery ticket," the old canary informed her cousin, who was making her stay somewhat long.

Or: "I believe the scoundrel will soon go mad. He's beginning to ramble."

His father-in-law alone visited him now and again. He would say a few words of comfort to the Major, and even promised to give Proserpinochka a thrashing. He never fulfilled his promise though, but wheedled a pile of silver from his luckless son-in-law.

Another month passed. Proserpinochka's relations with the Major changed, but not for the better. The canary overstepped the limits of decorum and did as she liked. She no longer acted the mute, but spoke to the siskin in the tones of an empress addressing the palace chimney-sweep.

"Money," she would demand.

"How much, my dear?"

"None of your 'how much'—just give it to me."

She never stooped to say how much she wanted, or what she did with it. Perhaps this was deliberate on her part, wishing to drive him mad, or perhaps it was not, "just so." Who can tell? A canary's soul is a blank, not even the wisest can make out where in this soul the graceful flutter of thought ends and where the instincts of the torturer begin. Be that as it may, the siskin never said no. He just went to the backroom of the hollow and with trembling hands returned with the money-box. And while she made free with his hoarded silver, smiling strangely as she did so, the siskin's heart was fit to break. Not because he was miserly; no, but because he felt

a vital need to know the exact state of his finances at any moment.

Having looted her husband's savings, she flew away, and an hour later he saw the results of the robbery. Proserpinochka at the head of a party of Uhlans and feather-brained young ladies would fly past with much noise and singing and alight on a near-by clearing. There they would picnic at the siskin's expense, and the whole company sang, danced and caroused far into the night, scattering from time to time to seek repose in the bushes.

One evening Proserpinochka came home in a state of great excitement. She fluttered about the hollow ("almost bruised her little breast!"), circled round and round, sang, laughed and wept.... At first the Major looked at her with consternation, which, however, soon gave place to connubial affection. The unhappy idea struck him that his wife had relented, that his suffering was now at an end, and that she was coming to meet him half-way, to fill him with rapture, with indescribable, heavenly rapture! A sweet and wonderful sensation flooded his whole being and moved him to a boldness by no means usual for a major of the Commissariat Department. Carried away by his passion he came up to Proserpinochka, as she stood at the opening of the hollow, gazing into the void beyond, and tapped her softly with his beak on the top of the head.

"Idiot!" she shouted, and, avoiding his embrace, flew away.

This was a decisive step on her part. Previously she had only spent the days out; now she will be flying away at night!

The next morning, however, she returned, but spent the whole day sobbing and sulking; and in the evening, when the Major was snoring, flew off again.

Two weeks passed. At night—mysterious disappearances, by day—hysterics and tears. The Major suffered agony; he followed her about with a pail of water in his beak, in case she felt faint, and besought her tearfully:

"Sip a little water, darling. Tell me your troubles—not as

to a husband, alas, I have not deserved that happiness, but as to a father, a brother! Who has upset you?"

"Idiot!!!"

Finally, the day came when she failed to return. The Major waited a day, two days, and then decided ... to wait for ever. This was a melancholy time for him, a time of utter loneliness. His wife had left him; her relatives had disappeared without saying a word—the old canary must have actually received a legacy from his aunt—and he was ashamed to look the other birds in the face: he was still an object of scorn, he had not yet justified himself. Even the linnet, his maid, gave notice and flew off with a sparrow to set up nest in a ramshackle garret.

Until now he had suffered, suffered acutely, to the point of distraction, the pain of which forced him to fly about madly, to cry out, to curse... and, yet, to hope. But now, although he still suffered, his agony had taken on a dull, passive form, which paralyzed action, chained the will and shrouded the future in impenetrable gloom.

Meanwhile autumn approached, and the birds began to fuss round their nests. The siskin alone did nothing, could not make up his mind whether to fly to warm climes or remain at home. The rains and cold winds set in; the woods, now bare, groaned dismally, and the nights were dark and long. The siskin, hungry, lonely and cold, perched cheerlessly at the edge of his hollow and waited, sleepless. Many a time did the murderous owl fly past, so near that her wing touched the hollow, and many a time did the bloodthirsty weasel peer into his hole. But by lucky chance neither weasel nor owl gave him trouble. Perhaps from the standpoint of edibility he was now too bony, or it may be that the voracious creatures remembered the able Commissariat official he had been in his time, and, not wishing to deprive the country of his services in the future, spared him.

Conscious that his life was in ruins, his thoughts involuntarily reverted to the past. And so clean, neat, and well-

ordered had his life been that the siskin's heart couldn't but rejoice. Nor had it been without pleasant adventures. Not only his Commissariat dealings, but, for instance, the wagtail. There was a quick, tidy wench for you—crisp as a little cucumber. At first she, too, used to giggle: "Oh, what a droll fellow you are!" Droll and droll, then one fine evening: "Darling, what a little fool I have been—just wasting time for nothing!" He should have married her then and there; instead, he went away and left her with six children. Or again—he had called at a roadside inn kept by the little widow quail, who sold millet-seed and buckwheat on the side. "How much is your millet? What's the price of buckwheat? Must be lonely without a husband, ma'am...." So they went on twittering, then the lights went out and.... He should have married her, too. He even promised that he would. But then, as usual, he ran away.

Ah, those were the days! The more heartlessly he had acted towards the quails and wagtails, the prouder he had been and the more praise he earned. "The Major's a dashing fellow," the Commissariat clerks used to say, "watch him sidling up to them, look at his swagger. Serves the silly hens right!"

Yes! What about going back to the Commissariat? Yes, why not? Here's pen and paper—just write an application—they'd take him without a word!

But scarcely had the thought occurred than he dismissed it impatiently. No, he should not be thinking of quails and wagtails now. Henceforth, there was only one thing for him—suffer in loneliness and wait—wait for his priceless yellow darling, his God-given wife! She would come back—she would come back for certain!

There were times, however, when he revolted. Not of his own free will, let it be said, but incited by the evil-intentioned birds who would come to borrow money. The worst in this respect was the blackbird. He invariably began by sympathizing with the siskin's lot, and afterwards would slyly insinuate that it was the easiest thing nowadays to get a divorce.

"Get a lawyer, old man," he would say, "and the thing's done! He'll fix it up for you in no time. Divorce the hussy, don't worry about her!"

The chaffinch, too, used to work him up. But he was against divorce, and advised the siskin to apply to the district police office.

"Too much honour for them, getting divorced because of every hussy that comes along! Complain to the police—they'll give her a thrashing that she'll remember all her life!"

But at length the Major succumbed to the tempters. He flew to St. Petersburg and made for the office of the lawyer Balalaikin.

"I want to get married but I've got a wife living. What about it?"

"At your service, sir," Balalaikin answered. "I've got four myself. I'm married to my fifth. And I've never been to prison yet."

But the tone of the lawyer's voice gave the siskin to understand that nothing would come of his effort. Having paid twenty kopeks—Balalaikin's fee (and for nothing but lies, too!)—he flew with heavy heart to the district police office, but with no better luck.

"Bring her along and we'll flog her," they said very reasonably, "but if you keep on bothering us, we'll flog you, too, major or no major!"

This, so to speak, was the last outburst of rebellious flesh. He returned home completely disheartened.

The winter passed. Half-frozen, half-famished and barely alive, the siskin struggled out of his hollow and just managed to reach the river. The ice was melting already, and pools had formed in places. He hopped up to one of them, hoping to find some food. But upon seeing his own reflection in the water, he gasped. He had become so lean, so skinny during the winter that his coat hung on him as if on a hanger. Not a trace remained of the former tidy neatly buttoned, plump

little siskin. His spurs had disappeared—God knows where. With aching heart he returned to his hollow, and from then on lost all hope.

What would be the use even if he lived to see her return? What welcome could he offer her? What proof could he give her of his loyalty, of loving marital devotion.

And then one warm night in May *she* came back. She came back poor in health, haggard, seeming ill at ease. The tiny crest on her head had been plucked out, her wing feathers crumpled, her tail shabby; even her little frock had faded and looked drab. Her frame shook, whether with cold or shame no one knows. The siskin hardly recognized her.

"Well, here I am!" she chirped.

"Come in," replied the siskin.

That was the last that ever passed between them. Not a whisper about the past, not a word about the future.

And so they have lived ever since—side by side in the same hollow, never talking, but always engrossed in thought. Perhaps they expect a miracle that will open their hearts and fill them with the joy of love and forgiveness. But it may be that, feeling utterly beaten, they sit in their hollow bitterly complaining. He: "You've broken my life, heartless doll!" She: "And you, you've poisoned my youth, hateful Major!"

THE TWO NEIGHBOURS

In a certain village there lived two neighbours: Ivan the Rich and Ivan the Poor. Now, the rich Ivan was always addressed as "sir," or Ivan Semyonich, but the poor one was just plain Ivan, or sometimes even Ivashka. Both were very good men, Ivan the Rich even excellent. A real philanthropist he was. And although he himself produced no values, he had the most noble views about the distribution of wealth. "That," he would say, "is my share. Some do not produce values and do not have noble ideas. Now, that is disgusting. But I'm all right." As for Ivan the Poor, he had no views at all about the distribution of wealth (hadn't time for them); he produced values instead, and he, too, said: "That is my share."

They used to meet on Saturday evenings, a holiday when rich and poor have time to spare, seat themselves on a bench outside the mansion of Ivan the Rich, and begin chatting.

"What will you have with your soup tomorrow?" Ivan the Rich would ask.

"Nothing," Ivan the Poor would answer.

"I'll have beef with mine."

At this Ivan the Rich would yawn, make the sign of the cross and gaze at his neighbour with compassion.

"Ours is a queer world," he would say. "One man toils the whole day long and has nothing in his soup but cabbage, even on Sundays, while another indulges in useful leisure and eats meat every day. Why is that?"

"I've wondered about it quite a long time myself. But I haven't any time for thinking. The minute I begin to think, why, there's firewood to be brought from the forest, and when I've done that there's manure to be carted or ploughing to be done—there's always something. And it keeps a fellow so busy that somehow the thoughts get lost in the meantime."

"Still, we should give the matter some thought!"

"That's what I say!"

Now it would be the turn of the poor man to yawn, make the sign of the cross and go to bed to dream of the morrow's meatless soup. Next morning he awoke, and lo—Ivan the Rich had prepared a treat for him—half a pound of beef for his Sunday soup.

On the following Saturday the neighbours met again and returned to the subject:

"Would you believe it," Ivan the Rich would say, "sleeping or waking I can't help thinking how poor you are compared with me."

"You are very kind, sir," Ivan the Poor answered.

"To be sure, my ideas are invaluable to society. But then, if you didn't do the ploughing in time, I'd be without bread just as often as you. Don't you think so?"

"Oh yes, that's true, sir. But if I didn't do the ploughing I'd be the first to die of hunger."

"There's truth in that, neighbour: it's a crafty business, this life of ours. But don't think that I approve of it! No, God forbid! The thing that really worries me is how to help Ivan the Poor so that he can live decently, get his share the same as I get mine."

"It's very kind of you to worry, sir. And it's quite true, if it weren't for your kindness I'd have had nothing but bread and kvass last Sunday."

"Not at all, don't mention it! Forget it! What I wanted to say is this. How many times have I made up my mind to give half my fortune to the poor. And I have really done so. But what happens? Today I give half of it away and tomorrow, I wake up and instead of the half I gave away I discover that a whole three-quarters has been returned to me."

"With interest, that is."

"Well, I just can't help it. I always steer clear of money, but it runs after me. I give two kopeks to the poor, and in their place, God knows how, I get three. It's all a marvel to me."

They talked in this strain until they began to yawn. And as they talked Ivan the Rich would be thinking of a way to put meat in his neighbour's soup on the morrow.

"Listen, friend," he would say, "it will soon be evening. Will you step into my garden and dig up a bed or two? Just fiddle about with your spade, and I'll do my best to reward you, as if you'd been working really hard."

And sure enough, Ivan the Poor would potter around for an hour or so and then have a good Sunday dinner, as if he'd been working "really hard."

And so the neighbours gossiped and gossiped until at last Ivan the Rich got so sore that he simply couldn't bear it any longer. "I'll go to the Great Grand Governor," he said, "go down on my knees before him and say: 'You are the Tsar's eye and ear! You condemn and bind, punish and pardon! Please put Ivan the Poor and myself on an even footing! If he is to be enlisted, let me, too, be enlisted, if he must provide

a cart, let me provide one, too, and if he pays a kopek per acre, then I should pay as well!' "

No sooner said than done. Ivan the Rich called on the Great Grand Governor, fell on his knees before him, and told him his troubles. The Great Grand Governor praised him highly: "All honour to you, worthy fellow, for keeping in mind your neighbour Ivan the Poor. Nothing pleases a governor's heart more than the knowledge that His Majesty's subjects live in amity and good will and help one another. No greater evil could befall them than to waste time in slander and strife." So said the Great Grand Governor. Then, on his own responsibility, he bade his assistants, by way of experiment, to make the two Ivans equal before the law and in the payment of taxes. No longer should one bear the yoke while the other had a song in his heart.

Home to his village came Ivan the Rich, as if walking on air.

"My dear fellow," he said to Ivan the Poor, "that's a load off my mind, thanks to our gracious Governor. By way of experiment you and I have been made equals in all things—taxes, duties, revenues and all. Should you be enlisted, I, too, will serve. If you are made to provide a cart, I will do likewise, and if you pay a kopek an acre I'll do the same. Soon you'll be having meat soup every day of the week and all because of this levelling."

Thus spoke Ivan the Rich, and aglow with good intentions, he went abroad. He spent two years in foreign parts where he devoted the time to useful leisure.

He visited Limburg and tasted Limburg cheese, visited Strassburg and ate the pies thereof, visited Bordeaux and sipped of its wine. Finally, he arrived in Paris, where he ate and drank everything. To cut a long story short, he had such a gay time that he could hardly stand on his feet. And all the time he kept thinking of Ivan the Poor. What a wonderful

time he would be having, now that they were equal in everything: eating and drinking to his heart's content!

In the meantime Ivan the Poor was leading a life of hard toil. Today he would plough up his tiny wheat patch, harrow it tomorrow, or, later in the season he would mow a road of meadowland and next day, if God sent good weather, would set about drying the hay. As for the ale-house, he had forgotten the way to it. He knew very well that the ale-house would be the death of him. And his faithful spouse, Marya Ivanovna, toiled away, too, reaping, harrowing, haymaking, and chopping firewood with her husband. Their children, now that they were growing up, also longed to help the elders. In short, the whole family was in turmoil from morning till night, and yet meatless cabbage soup was the staple dish on their table. For since Ivan the Rich had left, Ivan the Poor had been without even the pleasant surprises which used to come his way on Sundays.

"Hard luck," the poor fellow said to his wife. "Here I am made equal in everything, by way of experiment, with Ivan the Rich, and yet there's no change. One of us is rich, and that's not me. I haven't a stick or stone that I can call my own."

Ivan the Rich gasped when he returned: his neighbour was as needy as ever. Truth to tell, his first thought was that Ivashka had spent all his money at the ale-house. "Is he really such a drunkard, is he really past curing?" exclaimed Ivan the Rich with deep melancholy. But Ivan the Poor had no trouble in acquitting himself: he couldn't buy salt, let alone wine. There was ample evidence, too, that far from being a spendthrift he had been a diligent husbandman. He displayed all his implements and stock. Everything was there, the same as before Ivan the Rich had set out on his travels: one shambling bay mare, one brindled cow, one sheep, cart, wooden plough and harrow. Even the old sleigh was propped against the wall, although it was summer and wouldn't be needed until the

snow came, so that it could have been pawned at the ale-house with no great loss to the farm. Ivan the Rich stepped into the cottage: there, too, all was in order, except for the straw in the thatched roof which had been plucked out in places. But that was due to the shortage of fodder in the spring, so the mouldy straw had to be taken from the roof and fed to the cattle.

In a word, there was nothing to show that Ivan the Poor had been guilty of licentious or unthrifty behaviour. Here was a son of the soil, a downtrodden Russian muzhik, straining every effort to realize the right to live, but somehow succeeding only very, very inadequately.

"Good heavens, what does this mean?" groaned Ivan the Rich. "Here we are, equal in everything, both of us enjoying the same rights and paying the same taxes, and yet you get nothing out of it. What is the explanation, I wonder?"

"Yes, sir, I, too, wonder about it very often!" Ivan the Poor echoed miserably.

After this Ivan the Rich began to cudgel his brains and, of course, he found the reason. "The trouble is," he said, "that we have neither public nor private initiative. Society is indifferent, everyone is taken up with his own affairs, and all the beginnings made by the authorities come to nothing. So the first thing is to put some life into society."

Without wasting time Ivan Semyonich the Rich called an assembly and in full view of all the villagers delivered a brilliant speech on the benefits of public and private initiative. He spoke at length, with great eloquence and lucidity, as if casting pearls before swine. With facts in hand, he proved that the only robust and prosperous societies are those which are able to look to their own needs. And on the contrary, those which are passive and wait for events to develop their own way, doom themselves to gradual degradation and ultimate extinction. In other words, he there and then laid out before his listeners all the wisdom he had extracted from the Penny Alphabet.

The results surpassed all expectations. Not only did the

villagers have their minds refreshed, they even became self-conscious. Never before had they experienced so many diverse emotions. It seemed that the surging wave of life, long-expected, but for some reason long-detained en route, had at last reached them and raised those ignorant people to an extraordinary high level. The crowd rejoiced, exulting in its enlightenment, hailing Ivan the Rich as a hero. In the end it was unanimously resolved that a) the ale-house should be closed for ever, b) a system of mutual aid should be adopted by establishing a Free-Loan Farthing Society.

On that same day the Society's treasury received its first donation of two thousand and twenty-three farthings,—one for every inhabitant of the village. In addition, one hundred copies of the Penny Alphabet were presented gratis to the Society by Ivan the Rich. "Read it," he said to the villagers, "it contains all the wisdom you need."

Once again Ivan the Rich went abroad, and again his opposite number stayed at home to carry on his useful labours, which, this time, thanks to the newly established mutual-aid system and the profitable advice of the Penny Alphabet, would doubtlessly yield abundant fruit.

A year passed and then another; whether Ivan the Rich spent them eating cheese in Limburg and pie in Strassburg, I cannot say. But what I do know is this: when the two years were over and he returned home, he was really and truly shocked.

He found Ivan the Poor in a dilapidated shack, haggard and lean, with a bowl of kvass and black bread on the table, to which for taste, because it was Sunday, Marya Ivanovna had added a spoonful of linseed oil. The children were seated round the table, hurriedly swallowing their portions as if fearing a stranger might come and snatch it from them.

"Why *should* this be so?" Ivan the Rich exclaimed with a bitterness that bordered on despair.

"That's what I say, too, why should it be so?"

Again those Saturday evening talks began on the bench outside the mansion of Ivan the Rich. But no matter how thoroughly the two friends delved into the painful problem it was all in vain. At first Ivan the Rich suggested that perhaps "we are not sufficiently mature," but on reflection he acknowledged that mince pie could be eaten without any special education. He wanted to go deeper into the subject, but at the first attempt such bugbears emerged from its depths that he swore never to penetrate below the surface. In the end the two friends decided on a last resort—to seek the advice of Ivan the Fool, the local philosopher and sage.

Ivan was a native of those parts, a bandy-legged hunchback who, because of his deformities, was unable to produce values, but managed to exist by begging. But in the village, he was held to be as clever as the priest, and he certainly lived up to his reputation.

Who could tell fortunes on French beans and work miracles with a mirror better than he? Ivan the Fool had only to say the word "fire" and lo, the red rooster would flap his wings on somebody's roof. When the Fool said hail, hail it would be, bigger than a pigeon's egg, and the cattle would stampede like mad. Everybody feared Ivan the Fool. Whenever the tap-tap of his stick sounded at the window the housewife left her oven and rushed to give him the choicest morsel.

This time, too, Ivan the Fool proved worthy of his fame as a sage. Ivan the Rich had barely stated his case and put his question of "Why should it be so?" when Ivan the Fool, without a moment's hesitation, replied:

"Because your fortune has decreed it so."

Ivan the Poor, evidently, grasped it at once—he just shook his head hopelessly. But Ivan the Rich was frankly bewildered.

"Each has his own fortune." Ivan the Fool pronounced each word as clearly as possible, highly delighted at his own wisdom. "And this is what it says: Ivan the Poor lives at the watershed; his cottage, like an old and torn sieve, is full of

holes. So that riches flow past it and through it since there's nothing to hold them. But you, Ivan the Rich, live in the most sheltered spot in the whole countryside, and all the streams in the neighbourhood run towards you. Your mansion is solid and roomy, the paling is strong, and the streams of wealth just pour in and accumulate. You do not chase money, money chases you. If you were to give away half your belongings today, you would get back two-thirds tomorrow. Wherever you go you find more wealth. Such is your fortune. So you can talk until you are blue in the face or cudgel your brains as much as you like, you will not find a way out until fortune says so."

THE RATIONAL RABBIT

Although just an ordinary rabbit, he was very wise—his power of reasoning would do credit to an ass. He would huddle out of sight beneath a bush and begin talking to himself.

"Every beast," he said, "has his own lot—the wolf, the lion and the rabbit, too. And whether you like it or not, you are not asked. You just have to go on—that's all. Take us, the rabbits, for instance. Everybody eats us. It would seem that we have reason to complain. But after due consideration a complaint like that is hardly justified. For one thing, the one who eats us knows perfectly why he does so, and even if we were to lodge a just complaint it wouldn't stop anyone from eating us. Anyway, one won't eat more than one should and one won't eat less, either. The statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior...."

But at this point the rabbit usually fell asleep, for statistics had a stupefying effect on him. But after a nap he would resume his reasoning again, as soundly and as logically as ever.

"They keep on eating us and yet the number of rabbits increases yearly. We're not such fools, too, after all. Summer or winter, you can always see rabbits scurrying about on forest clearings. We wander into cabbage patches or fields of corn or near young apple-trees, and don't we give trouble to the peasants. Oh yes, you must keep a sharp eye on us rabbits. No wonder the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior. . . ."

More naps, more awakenings, and more and more of the soundest reasoning you ever heard. And so it went on, endlessly. He would think about that and cogitate about this in his master mind, and everything came out ideal. And what was most valuable, he had no intention of making a career or of flaunting his original views before the authorities (he knew they'd devour him before he would be able to speak a word). No—it was just that he liked to have his own views on things, a real, sound, rabbit's opinion. "There," you could picture him saying, "see what clever people we are!"

'Tis wrong to think, you surely must confess,
That glass is worse than gold because its price is less . . .

In this manner he once sat under a bush and thought he would show off before his mate. He stood on his hind legs, pricked up his ears, and twirling and twiddling his front paws, rattled away at top speed.

"Certainly," he said, "we rabbits live quite well when we choose. We celebrate weddings and we dance and brew beer on church holidays. Why, we put out sentries for miles around and we sing at the top of our voices. Naturally, the wolf hears us and pays us a visit. 'What's the singing?' And, of course, each bounds away as best he can. If you get off safe, well and

good—you brew ale elsewhere. If not, you're gobbled up, sure as I'm a rabbit. Am I right, wife?"

"If you are not lying, yes," said the cautious female, who was enjoying her tenth husband since maidenhood, each of the previous nine having died a violent death before her eyes.

"They're a rascally lot, those wolves, to be sure. All they think about is plunder," continued the rabbit. "How many times I've spoken, even written to the papers about it: Honoured sirs! Instead of killing a rabbit outright, why not just take his skin? He'll be able to present you with another in due time. The rabbit multiplies quickly, but if you slaughter a pile today and a pile tomorrow—well, you'll soon have the market price soaring! It would be another matter if you came along like decent people: dear sir, please deliver so many dozen rabbits for dinner. 'Delighted,' we would reply. 'Here, pack-leader, call up the next lot!' And everything would be quite respectable and lawful. You wolves and we rabbits—all would be pleased or at any rate hopeful. Yes, sirs, you and us, us and you, this, that and the other...."

The rabbit talked and talked in this strain, and we don't know how far he would have gone, when suddenly a rustle was heard in the grass nearby. He pricked up his ears—Good gracious! His wife had betaken herself off long ago, and there in the grass, was a wily old fox stealing towards him, for all the world as if she were going to play....

"Dear me, how clever you are, Mr. Rabbit!" the fox began. "It's such a delight to hear you, I could listen to you for ages and never get tired."

Ours was a shrewd rabbit, but even he went numb for the moment. He stood rooted to the spot, and you couldn't say what was uppermost in his mind: choosing which way to bolt, or for the first time looking straight at his own situation.

"You seem to be hungry, Miss Fox," he said, putting on as brave a front as possible.

"Lord bless you! Not at all! I've just had a lovely breakfast! I can't say what will be later on, but at present, no. And how's the world treating you, my bobtail?"

She squatted dog-wise and invited bunny to be seated, too. And he did, tucking all four paws underneath. And crouching there, poor fellow, he kept up his mental monologue: "Ah yes, it's just as I expected: each has his own lot: the lion, the fox and the rabbit, too. Well, rabbit lot, get me out of this mess!"

And the fox, as if reading his thoughts, praised our rational rabbit.

"What lucky wind has blown us such a philosopher?"

"My own parts are thirty leagues off. The way is long, but I covered it pretty fast. I don't say it was bad back home, but I had to leave! I'd a family there, a bit of a household, you know. We'd lived all winter in an empty cowshed on the squire's farm. And a jolly good time we had there, sleeping by day, and nibbling his maples and apple-trees by night. Then spring came and it was time to pack up for summer holidays in the woods. But just then a wolf paid a visit to the cowshed: 'What are you doing here, bobtails? Where's your permission?' I managed to get away myself, but the missus and the children...."

"I've heard the story. The wolf is my kinsman, you know, so there's nothing to be surprised at. 'The other day,' he told me, 'I hunted down a family of rabbits, but the father got away. Have you any notion where he can be?' And now here you are. I suppose you feel pretty cut up about your wife, eh?"

"I've forgotten about it now. I saw that it was high time to leave, so I departed. When I came here I met a young widow sitting all alone. 'Let's live together,' I suggested. And we did so. It wasn't bad with her, no quarrels or anything like that. But now she's made off and I'm still here."

"Too bad, too bad! Well, never mind, we'll soon have her, too."

The fox yawned and took a nip at the rabbit's hind parts (which the rabbit pretended not to notice); then rolled over on her side, tipped back her head and half-closed her eyes.

"The sun's in real earnest today," she drawled lazily, "as if it means business. Listen, bun, I'll take a snooze, and you talk to me."

And so they did as she suggested. The fox dozed and the rabbit sitting close by, within reach, began his tattle.

"I'm none of your grumblers, Miss Fox," said he. "I'm willing to live any old how. I was born barely three years ago and yet I've travelled half of Russia. Because before you get time to settle down a wolf, or an owl, or men come after you and give you a race for life. And then again, one's got to set up home somewhere miles and miles off. But I'm not complaining, I realize that it's the rabbit's lot. And there are times even when I don't realize it, and yet run away. It's the same with the peasant in our parts; he has just gone to sleep when there's a tap at the window: 'Uncle Mikhei, you're wanted with your horse and sledge!' A blizzard may be raging and a bitter frost outside, his horse may be half-dead, but what can he do? So off he goes with a cartful of soldiers and trudges through the snow on foot for a good twenty versts. And in a week or so he's back, with a handful of biscuits for his children, a shawl for his wife and tears for everybody. Now you ask him what he thinks of things. 'Why,' he'll tell you, 'that's the peasant's lot.' It's the same with us rabbits. We live as we can and never lay hands on ourselves. We are always ready.... Am I right, Miss Fox?"

The fox gave a half-bark in answer, as if in her sleep. The rabbit shot a quick look at her to see if she were really asleep. Was there a thought in his mind of making a getaway? We can't say for sure, but in all likelihood such policy might also fit in with the rabbit's life programme. However, along with

shutting her eyes, the fox lay back and stretched her legs, cunning brute; the rabbit guessed that she was playing the fool with him.

"Let me tell you how my uncle served a soldier. The soldier trapped him when he was small and taught him all kinds of military tricks. In gun-firing, drumming and other exercises my uncle had no equal.

"So they travelled from fair to fair and gave shows for a kopek here, an egg there, and sometimes for a crust of bread. Between shows the soldier used to tell my uncle about his life. 'I lived with my parents,' he said, 'until my father once sent me to rig out the sleigh for winter. I set to work, singing and smoking my pipe, when suddenly the bailiff came in. "Off with you to the elder, Semyon: it's your turn to join the army!" So I walked off just as I was; luckily I'd stuffed my pipe into my pocket. And so I went away and I toed the line for full twenty years.* And when I came home after that long absence there was nothing left.' That's how it is with the peasant," the rabbit added philosophically, "today he is a farmer, tomorrow a soldier, and they call that life. It's the same with us rabbits."

"What? Do you mean to say that you are called up for service, too?" the fox asked, as if she were just waking up.

"No, ma'am, we're just eaten," the rabbit replied in the most airy fashion.

"I should think so, what kind of soldiers would you make? Worse than the old garrison invalids that that grand old General Bibikov** used to call *junk*. I suppose the soldier ate your uncle, too?"

* The rabbit is evidently speaking of a time long ago when soldiers served for over 20 years and when recruits were put in irons to prevent them from deserting.—*Author.*

** General Bibikov headed the punitive expeditions sent to suppress the Pugachov uprising. The garrison soldiers as a rule deserted and joined the rebel peasants.—*Ed.*

"No, the soldier died, and my uncle ran away. He came home, but could no longer do rabbit's work—he was out of practice. And my aunt, too, refused to feed him for nothing. So one day he made up his mind to go to the fair and put on a show himself. But he had just started his first performance on the drum when dogs fell on him and tore him to bits."

"Serves him right for bothering people. But I'm sure that he knew that he would be eaten—right from the start—if not by dogs, then by wolves or foxes. There's one end for you all. By the way, bunny, tell me what are the foxes like in your parts? Pretty sharp, I imagine?"

"Yes, they are, indeed; I have never had any dealings with them myself, but a hunter once shot one before my eyes. And I must say, I was..." the rabbit wanted to say he was glad, but pulled himself up in the nick of time. But the fox divined his sentiments.

"So that's the kind of villain you are," she barked and bit him in the side, and so hard indeed that he bled.

The rabbit squealed in pain, but pulled himself together and began to explain: "I mean the foxes in our parts, ma'am; the foxes here are kind, they say!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes, really! Last year a little bun in our forest lost his parents, and one of the foxes brought him up with her own cubs."

"Really! Don't say that she brought him up and then let him go? Where is he at this moment, that orphan of yours?"

"Who knows? They say he ended badly, after all. Began to steal, ran wild, and finished by seducing a young fox. And because of that they say that the mother fox ate him."

"Now, my dear, it was I who ate him; I'm the fox you heard about. But I didn't eat him because he ran wild! Oh no! It was just because his time had come."

The fox thought for a minute and snapped at a flea. Then she got up unhurriedly, shook herself, and with perfect good

humour said to the rabbit: "And who do you suppose I'll eat now?"

Clever though he was, the rabbit didn't guess that. Or rather, the thought had flashed through his mind: "It's all over, my rabbit's lot..." but he was loath to admit it even to himself.

"I don't know," he said, but his face and voice gave him away so plainly that the fox waxed furious.

"What a liar you are!" she said. "They've told me God knows what about you: he's a philosopher, a fortune-teller, a this and a that—and now it turns out that you're just an ordinary scamp of a rabbit. It's you I'm going to eat, you, and no one else."

The fox jumped as if to pounce on the rabbit. Then she sat down and scratched behind her ears, as if nothing had happened.

"Perhaps you'll let me off," suggested the rabbit in a timid half-whisper.

"Good gracious!" cried the fox more indignant than ever. "Did you ever hear of a fox pitying and of a rabbit being pitied? Do we two live under the same sky so that we should play at pitying, you booby?"

"Well, ma'am, there have been instances, you know," persisted the rabbit, still showing a brave front. But straightaway he faltered, and began to lose spirit.

He recalled his entire life—how he'd spent it rushing about like a peasant dissenter in search of the Heavenly City, how he'd sat whole days in hollow trees, with nothing to eat and trembling with fright; how once, running away from a wild beast, he had plunged into a peasant's cellar. Luckily, that was during Lent, and the peasant had let him go unharmed. He recalled his rabbit sweethearts, how he'd brought up babies with them, but never had time to dandle them properly for having to save his skin. And while all this passed through his mind, he kept repeating:

"Ah, if only I could remain alive, at least for a little bit longer!"

Meanwhile, the fox had prepared a nice surprise for the rabbit.

"Look here, nasty bunny! I took you for a true philosopher, and now just look how you tremble at the very notion of death. Now, I'm offering you this chance. I'll go away four paces, sit down with my back to you, you dirty little bunny, and I won't look at you for the space of five minutes. You'll run past and try to dodge me. If you do—that's your luck, if you don't, it's all over with you."

"Oh, ma'am, how can I!"

"Stupid! Even if you don't get away, it'll pass the time for you. Get busy—kill time—and you'll feel much better. Just like the soldiers, they keep killing time until they get killed themselves."

The rabbit thought for a minute. He had to agree that the fox had really found a way out. Anyhow, it's much more pleasant to be eaten while doing something than pine away in idle expectation. That means a true rabbit's death—to die while running. You are pelting along at top speed, and suddenly—bang—it's all over!

"You don't know what's happening and in a minute you're torn in two," the rabbit persuaded himself and then added mechanically: "And perhaps, after all. . . ."

"There, now, leave off those fancies!" the fox warned him, guessing the faint hope that had flashed across his mind. "Better forego those fancies; be a man! . . . Now then, God bless you, ready, steady, go!"

At that the fox took four steps forward. But first she planted the rabbit with his back to a dense clump of bushes, so that, much as he would like to, he couldn't bolt backwards, but would have to run straight towards her.

The wily vixen sat down and got busy with her affairs, pretending to take no notice of the rabbit. But the rabbit had

no doubt at all that even if she were to go away another four paces, she would still be conscious of his every movement. Once or twice he sprang to his feet and laid back his ears. Several times he flexed himself as if ready to perform a wonderful leap that would carry him beyond pursuit. But the certainty that the fox saw everything without looking, rooted him to the spot. Nevertheless, the fox had been right in a way—the rabbit had indeed found a rabbit-like occupation, which, to a great extent, eased his agony.

At last the fatal five minutes expired, but the rabbit sat in the same place, engrossed in contemplating his thoroughly rabbit-like plight.

"Well, now let's play with you, bunny!" the fox suggested.

They began to play. For a quarter of an hour the fox kept skipping round the rabbit: now she would snap at him as if about to tear his throat, then spring aside, uncertain whether or not to pardon him, after all. But even that helped the rabbit to kill time, for although he offered no actual resistance, there were times when he covered his face with his paws and squealed.

But it was all over in a quarter of an hour. All that was left of the rabbit were bits of fur and the rabbit-like wisdom that he preached! "Every beast has his own lot: the lion, the fox, and the rabbit, too. . . ."

THE LIBERAL

Once upon a time in a certain country there lived a liberal, so outspoken a liberal that no one could get a word in before he'd start blaring: "Ah, what *are* you doing, sirs? Do you want to ruin yourselves?" Nobody got angry with him—on the contrary—everyone praised him: "That's right, let the liberal warn us—we shall be all the better for it!"

"Three factors," said the liberal, "should form the basis of every society: liberty, security and initiative. A society deprived of freedom cannot have any ideals, vigorous thought, any stimulus for creative activity and no confidence in the future. A society bereft of security is stamped with despondency and indifference. And lastly, a society without initiative cannot administer to its own needs and gradually forgets the very concept of homeland."

So thought the liberal, and, truth bids us say, thought justly. He saw people crawling around him like poisoned flies, and upon seeing this, said to himself: "That comes of not feeling themselves masters of their own destiny. They are simply galley-slaves to whom fortune and misfortune come without any prevision on their part, who never surrender to their emotions, since they cannot decide whether they really are emotions or simply phantasmagoria." In short, the liberal was firmly convinced that only the three aforementioned factors could provide a stable foundation for society and bring in their wake all the other blessings needed for social development.

Nor was that all. Not only did the liberal think nobly, he longed to perform noble deeds. His cherished desire was that the ray of light which gave warmth to his own thoughts should pierce the surrounding darkness, illumine it and impart to all the spirit of benevolence. He claimed that all men are brothers and he appealed to all to bask in the sun of his beloved ideals.

Of course, this tendency to transfer ideals from the celestial sphere to practical reality was not altogether above suspicion, but the liberal was so frank and ardent, and, moreover, so sweet and obliging to everyone, that he was forgiven even his doubtful ideas. He could tell the truth with a smile, act the innocent wherever necessary, and display his unselfishness to advantage, too. But, above all, he was never too pressing with his demands, always requesting that they be granted *if possible.*

Certainly, the use of the phrase *if possible* could hardly enhance his reputation as an irreconcilable. But the liberal consoled himself, firstly, for the sake of the common cause which he placed above everything else, and secondly, in order to save his ideals from unnecessary and untimely decease. Moreover, he realized that the ideals which inspired him were far too abstract to exercise any direct influence on reality. After all, what were they, liberty, security and initiative? Abstract terms which had yet to be invested with tangible content so that society could flourish. Such terms, generally speaking, may

help to enlighten society to raise its hopes and beliefs to a higher plane, but they cannot directly produce the material benefits which alone engender universal contentment. To achieve this state of well-being, i.e., to make the ideal accessible to all, it should be converted into trivialities and thereafter applied to stricken humanity. And it is precisely at this stage, when the ideals are converted into trivialities, that the phrase *if possible* makes its spontaneous appearance; and when two parties collide, it impels one to make *certain* concessions and the other to curtail its demands *considerably*. All this was perfectly clear to our liberal, who, armed with these considerations, girded his loins for war against reality. But first, naturally, he sought the opinion of the *well-informed*.

"Liberty—surely it cannot be reprehensible, I imagine?"

"Not only is it not reprehensible, it is highly commendable," replied the well-informed. "In fact, it is pernicious slander that we do not desire liberty; the truth is, there is nothing we cherish more. But of course, within limits...."

"Hm. *Within limits*.... I see! And what do you say to security?"

"Oh, that is equally welcome.... But of course, also within its limits...."

"Well, and what do you think of my ideal of social initiative?"

"Why, it's just what we've been craving for. But of course also within limits...."

Well, if within limits then in limits let it be. The liberal himself knew perfectly well that it could not be otherwise. Let the bay out without the bridle and he will do mischief that will take years to repair. A bridle's the very best thing on earth! Put it on the bay and he keeps looking backwards all the time. "Yes... old bay, better look out, or you'll taste the whip! That's the spirit!"

So said the liberal and he set about his business, *within limits*, of course, biting off a morsel here and letting a bit go there, and at times lying low altogether. The well-informed

watched him and were mighty well pleased. At one time they were so much taken by his work that you'd think they were about to become liberals themselves.

"Go ahead," they encouraged him. "Say nothing about this, wink at that, and don't bother about anything else. Then everything will be perfect. Ah, yes, dear goat, we would gladly let you into our garden, but you can see for yourself how high the fences are!"

"Yes, I can see that very well, but I am so ashamed for my ideals, so ashamed to forego them that you really can't imagine it."

"That's nothing, you can still stand a little shame—it won't do you any harm. And you can still go ahead with your little scheme, even *within the limits of possibility.*"

However, as the liberal game of *if possible* proceeded, the well-informed divined that even in their present form the liberal's ideals looked far from rosy. On the one hand, the business had been planned on too wide a scale, on the other, it wasn't mature enough to be accepted.

"Your ideals are too much of a burden for us," the well-informed said to the liberal. "We are not ready for them yet, not mature enough."

And so vividly and minutely did they outline their faults and their foulness, that the liberal, bitter pill though it was, was forced to admit there was a fatal flaw in his enterprise. It wouldn't work, that's all!

"How sad!" he lamented.

"What a strange fellow you are!" the well-informed consoled him. "Don't shed tears over this business, it's not worth it. What, you want the future to belong to your ideals? Well, we have no objection to that. Only don't be in such a hurry, for God's sake! If your plans have failed within the limits of possibility, you can still gain *something at least,* and ought to be satisfied with it. *Something at least* has its value, too, you know. Little by little and bit by bit, with a prayer to God and without any hurry—and before you know where you are, you'll

have your foot in the temple. Nobody has ever looked into that temple since it was built, and there—you'll be the first. My, what a thrill! That's something to be grateful for."

Nothing could be done. One had to put up with it. If you can't gain *as far as possible,* then try and gain *at least something*, and be thankful if you do. Our liberal acted accordingly and soon got so used to the new conditions that he was astonished at his own stupidity in thinking there could be any other. And at this point any number of analogies came to his aid. Even a grain doesn't yield fruit all at once, you see. And there is a lot of trouble with it until it grows up. First it must be planted, then wait for it to germinate, sprout and shoot up, form a tube, develop ears, and so on. There, see how many miracles are needed before it returns to you a hundredfold. The same thing goes for this business of chasing ideals. Sow your *something at least* in the ground, and sit down and wait.

So our liberal planted his *something at least* in the ground and sat down to wait. But no matter how long he sat his *something at least* just wouldn't sprout, that's all. Had it fallen on a stone, confound it, or had it gone rotten in the dung? Who could tell?

"What could have happened?" the liberal mumbled in dismay.

"The point is, sir, you want too much," replied the well-informed. "You know perfectly well how vile and weak the public is. You want to do them good, but they will drown you in a teaspoon if they can. It requires much skill to keep a clear conscience with such people."

"Have mercy on us! Who's talking about conscience now? Look, you knew what I was when I started out—and what am I now? I've lost all the decency that I ever had. At first I acted on the principle of *if possible*, then slid down to *something at least.* Good God, is there anything left for me to dispense with?"

"Oh yes, certainly! What would you say, for instance, to becoming reconciled with foulness?"

"How?"

"Quite simple. You say that you have brought us ideals? Very well, to that we answer, if you want us to sympathize, then you must be ready to become reconciled. . . ."

"Eh?"

"Exactly! Don't just soar into the skies with your ideals! No, bring them down to earth until they suit our taste, then go ahead and become reconciled. And then, perhaps, we, too, if we see any use. . . . Yes, sir, we're old birds ourselves. We've seen plenty of schemers like you. Not so long ago General Crocodilov came along with proposals just like you—'My ideal,' he said, 'is the lock-up, sirs! Now then, if you please!' We were foolish enough to believe him, and now he's actually gone and locked us up!"

The liberal thought deep upon hearing these words. Already nothing but the labels remained of his ideals. And now, to top it all, direct foulness was being prescribed to them. If things went on like this he'd soon be transformed into a downright scoundrel. Good heavens, what was to be done?

But the well-informed, seeing him so doubtful, began to encourage him. "Once you've started the job, carry on and don't act the fool! Now that you've stirred us up, prove that you didn't do so for nothing."

The liberal set to work, and everything he did from now on was done in compliance with foulness. When he tried to wriggle out of it, one of the well-informed would grab him by the sleeve: "Now, Mr. Liberal, what are you up to? Look straight!"

So time passed and the cause of progress (becoming reconciled with foulness, of course) advanced. Not a vestige remained of his former ideals, only a bad odour. But still the liberal did not lose heart. "What if I've really trampled my ideals in the mud? Personally, I'm still straight as a lamp-post. Today I wallow in the mire, but tomorrow the sun will shine and the mud will dry. And then I'll be the same happy-go-lucky fellow I used to be." And the well-informed listened to his bragging and readily agreed: yes, sir, just so.

Well then, one day he was walking in the street with a friend, prattling as usual about his ideals and exulting in his wisdom, when suddenly he felt something splash his cheek. What could it be? He looked up to see if it was raining. But no, there wasn't a cloud to be seen, and a blazing sun shone in the sky. True, there was a slight breeze, but since it was forbidden to throw slops out of windows, there could be no suspicion of that.

"I say, what miracle is this?" the liberal said to his companion. "It is not raining, it couldn't possibly be slops, and yet I feel drops of some kind on my cheek."

"You see that somebody hidden round the corner?" replied his friend. "It's his doing. He wanted to spit at you for your liberalism, but he lacked the pluck to spit straight in your face. And so, becoming reconciled with foulness, he spat from around the corner and the wind carried the spittle to your face."

THE OLD NAG

An old Nag lies by the roadside lost in a heavy sleep. The peasant had just unharnessed him and let him out to feed. But the animal has no stomach for food. The strip they had just ploughed was a stony one. It required a great effort on the part of Nag and master to finish it.

Old Nag is the commonest piece of peasant livestock, whipped and emaciated, with narrow chest, ribs jutting out, broken knees and shoulders, blistered by the sun. His head droops, mane is matted, eyes and nostrils ooze slime and the lip hangs like a pancake. One cannot do much work with such a creature, but work one must. Day in and day out the old Nag is in harness. In summer he works from morning till night in the fields, and in winter, right up to the thaw, he does "carting."

How can he pick up strength? The fodder he gets is hardly worth the name. In summer when they unharness him for

night pasture he can at least taste nice, soft grass, but in winter when he's carting he just gets a bundle of mouldy straw. In spring, when they drive the cattle to field, he is lifted to his feet with the help of poles; and in the fields there is hardly a blade of grass to be seen. Only here and there one sometimes comes across tufts of wilted rubbish that the cows missed in the autumn.

Truly, the old Nag's life is a wretched one. What a good thing he's got a kind master, who never whips him without need. The two of them plod out with a wooden plough: "Gee up, me hearty, go to it!" Old Nag hears the familiar cry and goes to it. He stretches out his sorry frame, pushes with forelegs and shoves with hind, muzzle bent and touching his chest. "There, jail-bird, on you go!" The peasant, too, throws his whole weight on the plough, his hands clenched like grapples on the handles, sinking to the ankles in the earth, watching the plough lest it cheats and misses a bit. They complete one furrow from end to end, and both stand trembling—yes, death has come, come to claim them both, man and Nag, death—every day of their life.

The dust-covered cart-track runs like a narrow ribbon from village to village, dives into a hamlet, then bobs out again and runs on and on, heaven knows where. And throughout its entire course, on either side, it is guarded by fields; there is no end to the fields; they extend far and wide, filling everything all the way to the line where sky meets earth. Golden, green or bare—they hold the village in a relentless grip, and there is no way out except into the yawning abyss of fields. There he is, man walking onward into the distance. It looks as if his legs must soon give way, so fast is he hurrying; but from afar he seems to be simply marking time, unable to tear himself from this overwhelming expanse of fields. The tiny, barely visible speck is hardly moving, just fading imperceptibly—fading, fading until suddenly it disappears, as though the expanse of fields had absorbed it.

From century to century it lies rigid, this motionless, formidable mass of fields, as if keeping watch over some magic power held captive within its bosom. Who will deliver this power from captivity, summon it forth to meet the light? This task has fallen to the lot of two beings—the peasant and the Nag. And the two of them groan under the task from birth to death, shedding blood and sweat. And still the fields have not given up their fabulous power, the power that would untie the peasant's bonds and heal the Nag's aching shoulders.

The old Nag lies where the sun is hottest; no tree is there in sight and the air is so hot that it stops one's breath. At times, but very seldom, a whirlwind of dust scurries along the roadway, yet the wind that raises it brings no freshness, but only another blast of heat.

The gnats and the horse-flies buzz madly under the Nag's belly, swarm around his muzzle and bite his sores. His ears twitch now and again as they sting. Is the old Nag dreaming or is he dying? No one can guess. He cannot even complain that his inside is afire with the heat and the merciless strain—God has denied even this comfort to the dumb brute. He lies there dozing, and it's not dreams that filter into the tortured agony which serves as his rest, but a disjointed, overwhelming nightmare—a nightmare devoid of forms, even of monstrous forms, accompanied only by huge blotches, now black, now fiery-coloured, which stay or move with the exhausted Nag, dragging him after them, deeper and deeper into a bottomless pit.

The field is endless, there is no escape from it. The old Nag has tramped up and down with the plough, and still the end is not in sight. Bare, in bloom, or motionless under its mantle of snow, it thrusts out far and wide, monarch of everything and of all, not challenging anything, but simply seizing and enslaving. There is no fathoming its secrets, it cannot be conquered or exhausted. Today it lies stark and dead, tomorrow

it is born anew. There is no distinguishing what is alive and what is dead in it. But of its death and its life the Nag is the first witness. For all others the field means freedom, poetry, space; for the Nag it spells slavery. The field weighs down on him, deprives him of his last ounce of energy, and is for ever craving more. The old Nag trudges wearily on, from sunrise to sunset, and in front of him moves a shimmering black mass, dragging him on and on. There it is again, in front of him, and again he hears in his semi-sleep the well-known cry: "Gee up, my hearty, gee up, devil, on, on!"

It will never go out, that ball of fire which the whole livelong day pours its torrents of heat on the old Nag, never will there be an end to the rain, thunder, blizzards and frost. Everyone hails nature as a mother, but for him she is a scourge, a torture. For him there is no fragrance, no harmony of sound and colour. He knows no other sensations save those of weariness, of misery, of pain. Let the sun fill all nature with its warmth and light, let its rays summon all to live and to rejoice; the unfortunate Nag knows only that it adds more torture to the countless tortures of his life.

Work without let-up. Work is the sum and substance of his existence. For work he is conceived, for work he is born, and were it not for work nobody would need him; what is more, the thrifty farmer would regard him as a loss. The entire surroundings in which he lives are directed solely to one end: to prevent exhaustion of the muscular force which enables him to work. He gets only just enough rest and food to be able to struggle through his task. After that—let the field and the elements do their worst—nobody cares how many new wounds are caused to his feet, shoulders and back. It is not his welfare that is considered, but that he should have enough life in him to bear the yoke of his work. How many centuries has he borne that yoke; he does not know; how many more will he have to endure it—that he does not reckon. He just lives on as though

sinking into a black abyss, and of all the sensations known to a living body he knows only the gnawing pain caused by endless work.

The old Nag's life bears the stamp of eternity. He does not really live, yet he does not die. The field, octopus-like, clings to him with myriad tentacles; it will not release him from the fatal furrow. No matter what his distinguishing marks may be, he is one and the same everywhere—whipped, tormented, mutilated, and half-alive in his terrible agony. Like the field which he waters with his blood he does not count days, nor years, nor ages; he knows only eternity. His brethren are scattered all over the great field. You can see the poor brute everywhere, straining his wretched body to the utmost, always and ever the same wretched old Nag. An indeterminate mass lives within him, undying, indivisible, indestructible. Life is endless—and that is the only thing clear to this mass. But what is this life? Why has it shackled the Nag in the chains of eternity? Whence does it come, and whither is it bound? Perhaps the future will one day give the answers to these questions. But perhaps it, too, will be as mute and unimpassioned as the dark abyss of the past, which filled the world with ghosts and allowed the living to become their prey.

The Nag drowses on, while past him trot the good-for-nothing Gallopers. At first glance no one would say that the old Nag and the good-for-nothing Galloper are sons of the same sire. However, the tradition of their kinship still lives on.

There lived at one time an old Horse, who had two sons: the Nag and good-for-nothing Galloper. The second son was polite and sensitive, while the Nag was crude and not very sensitive. Long did the Father tolerate the Nag's crudeness, and long did he treat both sons equally, as befits a loving parent. But at long last he waxed wroth and proclaimed: "This is my will for ever and aye: Nag shall inherit the straw, and good-for-nothing Galloper the oats." And so from then on good-for-nothing

Galloper was given a warm stable, with soft bedding on the floor, he was given mead to drink and his manger was filled with the best millet. But old Nag was pushed into a cowshed and given an armful of mouldy straw: "Champ away, old Nag! You can drink in that puddle!"

Good-for-nothing Galloper had almost forgotten that he ever had a brother in the world. But suddenly he had a fit of the dumps and remembered. "I'm fed up," he said, "with my comfortable stable, weary of honey and tired of good millet; I want to see how my brother lives."

He visited him and, lo and behold, he discovered that his brother was immortal. They beat him with everything they could lay hands on, and yet he lived! They fed him on mouldy straw, and yet he lived. And wherever the visitor cast his eyes he could see his brother toiling away like a slave. Just now you had seen him this side, and in the twinkling of an eye he would be right over there, treading along, one leg after the other.

My goodness, he must be charmed, for you can break a stick over him and yet not break him.

And so the good-for-nothing Gallopers began strutting around the old Nag.

One said:

"I know why nothing can upset the Nag. Endless work has endowed him with such a stock of common sense that he knows that ears don't grow higher than the forehead, and you can't break an axe-head with a rope. And so he lives in his own small way, wrapped in a tangle of proverbs, cosy as may be. Bless you, old Nag! Get on with your job, don't dream at it!"

"Oh no," another objected, "it isn't common sense at all that has given him this strength and endurance! For what after all is common sense? Common sense is something ordinary, clear and definite to the point of banality; it makes one think of a mathematical formula or of police order. No, it is not common sense that sustains the inextinguishable soul of our Nag,

but the fact that he bears in himself the life of the spirit and the spirit of life. And so long as he retains these two treasures there is not a stick in the world that can break him!"

And a third exclaimed:

"What nonsense you are talking, 'the life of the spirit, the spirit of life'; you are simply juggling with words! That has nothing whatever to do with the old Nag's invincibility. The true reason is that he has found his real mission in life. That is what gives him equilibrium, makes him at peace both with his own conscience and the conscience of his class. Yes, it is that which imparts remarkable strength to his character and endows him with the tenacity that not even centuries of slavery can conquer. Toil on, old Nag! Keep at it! Go ahead! May you find in your work the clarity of soul that we, the good-for-nothing Gallopers, have lost for ever."

Then a fourth (who, evidently, had come direct to the stable from a pot-house) put in:

"Ah, gentlemen, gentlemen! You are wasting your breath. There's no special inner reason why nothing gets him down. The point is, he is used to this wretched life since time immemorial, and you can batter a whole tree to pieces against his sides and yet he'll live. There, look at him—it would seem that there is hardly a breath in him—yet tickle him the right way with a whip and he'll get going again. Each does the job assigned to him. Just try and count how many such cripples there are straggling all over the field—all exactly alike. Cripple them as much as you can and there won't be even this much less of them. One moment he has disappeared, the next he has risen again from the ground."

And since all this talk had no source other than idleness, or at best, the dumps, the good-for-nothings would continue talking until it ended in a row. Fortunately, just then the peasant would waken and bring the dispute to an end by the mere cry:

"Gee up, jail-bird, get going!"

At this all the good-for-nothings would catch their breath with delight.

"Look, look!" they would shout in unison, all quarrels forgotten and peace and amity restored. "See how he stretches his poor old body, how he digs his front hoofs into the soil, how he pushes with his hind legs! Yes, truly, the good workman does a good job! Hold on, Nag! There's someone from whom we can learn! We must follow his example! Gee up, jailbird, gee up!"

IDLE TALK

It doesn't happen nowadays, but at one time Voltairians were found among the topmost ranks of officialdom. The very highest officials paid tribute to the fashion and the lesser breeds followed suit.

At this very time there lived a Governor who doubted lots of things which others in their simplicity believed. For the life of him he just couldn't understand why the office of Governor was needed.

The Marshal of the Nobility in that gubernia, on the contrary, believed in everything and had all the reasons for the governorship at his finger-tips.

And so one day they sat in the Governor's study and began to argue.

"Between you and me," said the Governor, "I don't fully understand. I think that if every single one of us Governors

was quietly dismissed nobody would pay the slightest attention."

"My, Your Worship, how can you say a thing like that!" exclaimed the Marshal, alarmed and even frightened.

"Well of course, this is strictly confidential.... But quite frankly, I repeat, I cannot understand. Imagine—people live in peace, obey their God and Empress, and then—lo and behold! —a Governor is sent to them. Why? Wherefore? For what earthly reason?"

"Why, to represent authority," the Marshal admonished him. "Certainly, we cannot dispense with *that*. At the top stands the Governor, midway—the captain of police, and at the other end the beadle. And all around them the marshals, presidents, soldiers...."

"Yes, I know that. But why, that's the question. Now, the beadle, you say. Good. He keeps an eye on the peasant—sounds quite reasonable. And yet, consider: the peasant lives quietly in his village, ploughs and mows, multiplies and increases—in short, he makes the rounds of his life, when suddenly, out of the clouds, comes the beadle. Why? What has happened?"

"Nothing as yet, but you never can tell, Your Worship."

"No, no. I'm not having that. If people are contented and live in peace, worship God and obey their Empress, how can anything be wrong? Or, rather, could anything be better? And in any case what can the beadle do? If God sends a good harvest, well and good, if not, why, they just have to pull through somehow. And the beadle—can he make it a grain more or less? Of course not! He'll simply rush in, make a fuss, and as likely as not, finish up by clapping someone into jail! Yes, that's about all he can do."

"But people are not sent to jail for nothing. There's always a reason, Your Worship!"

"But you will agree that if the beadle hadn't been brought in everything would have gone on as usual and that *something* would not have happened? At any rate no one would now be in

jail. And that's my point: the moment the beadle appears on the scene the *something* happens immediately."

"Yes, but there are beadles *and* beadles, Your Worship."

"You must listen to me. I am not speaking about individuals; nor am I speaking in paradoxes. I know this business myself. I speak from experience! For instance, when I leave the gubernia what happens? I have hardly gone beyond the gates and lo, the very air becomes tranquil; the chief of police stops his galloping, his sergeants cease their scurrying, and the beadles, too, curb their zeal. Even the simpletons who have never heard of me feel that life has taken on a brighter hue, as if a painful thorn had been pulled out of their side. Now, what do you suppose that means? This, my dear sir, just this: my substitute *can't punish as I can.* It follows, then, that life becomes that much easier for everyone. As much easier as I am higher in office than he. But when I return and resume my duties—the noise, the bedlam and the galloping start all over again. The fellow who wore a bowler returns to his cocked hat; he who lived life to the full sinks into the dumps again. For everyone there is nothing but the old hateful routine. But why should I be telling you all this? You, I am sure, must have experienced it yourself, to some extent at least."

True, the Marshal recalled, he, too, had a sense of guilt in this respect. Because whenever the Governor had left his office he had called for his carriage and departed to his house in the country. And there he would lounge in négligé until summoned to duty by his chief. There was only one little formality: before leaving it was necessary to drop in at the Vice-Governor's:

"Don't forget to let me know, Arefy Ivanovich, just in case. . . ."

"Why, there's not the slightest danger! Off you go and God be with you!"

"Bye-bye, then! Regards to Kapitolina Sergeyevna! Hi you, get a move on!"

And without more ado he would trot out of sight.

"Yes, it happens sometimes, but not because of what you say. It's ... it's because one needs a rest now and then and must take the chance...."

"Rest! There you go again. Who stopped you from resting before that? It's not a sin to rest, is it? Not at all. No sin whatever! I didn't let you rest just because I am the Governor. Now let's go a bit further. Have you ever listened to what people say when they want to praise the Governor? They say: 'What a good Governor ours is, he never makes a fuss and leaves folk alone.' It seems that the best thing a Governor can do is simply to sit and do nothing. And really, come to think of it, what's the use of him meddling with the affairs of other people? He arrives in his province a total stranger—that's the first thing. And the second, if he ever did learn anything you can rest assured that it wasn't the right thing. You can bet your life that he knows nothing about statistics and enthnography or anything about the people and their customs. Where, how and why a river flows he will discover only after four or five drives through the entire gubernia. And as for railways, all he knows is the time-table—how not to miss his train. But why the line was built, what profit it brings and where a new branch is wanted—that is a closed book where he is concerned. He could, if he chose, master the subject—the facts are at hand—but he's far too lazy and ignorant, and even if he did, little good it would do.*

"Or about our handicrafts and trades; shoemaking, say, or market gardening; here they make bast mats, there—sickles, scythes and what not. Why? Wherefore? You might as well ask where do flies go in winter?"

"But, Your Worship," the Marshal broke in, "I'm a native here and I don't know all that!"

"It is different in your case; you're the Marshal. They bring you beef for dinner. What do you care where it comes from so

* Naturally, this is possible only in a fairy-tale.—*Author*

long as it is edible. But I am the Governor, and I am supposed to know everything. You can easily imagine somebody saying to me, 'What is the state of market gardening in your gubernia?' "

"Yes, Your Worship, anything can be expected nowadays."

"Nowadays, my dear sir, every kopek must be accounted for, every bit of rubbish must be listed. 'How about a tax on *that*?' That's how things are today. And to avoid trouble the only answer one ever gives is 'Much to be desired, sir!' "

"Y-yes, and yet our cabbage. . . ."

'There you go again—'cabbage'! If you want to know, I heard of it yesterday for the first time. They brought me a plate of stewed cabbage; for all I know it might have come from Algeria—but it was grown at our Pozdeyevka."

"Yes, it's astonishing what they grow in Pozdeyevka—carrots, turnips and greens of all kinds. It has always been like that with us. We go to Ems and Marienbad and all kinds of places to drink the waters, and we've got mineral waters of our own right here at Pozdeyevka, and better water at that; it doesn't upset the stomach like the Marienbad stuff."

"Tell me, who'd you think first planted that cabbage in Pozdeyevka? The Governor? Not on your life. It was one of our humble peasants, sir; a Semyon Smallfry from Pozdeyevka happened to be in Rostov in the days of yore, say, saw a good way of growing cabbage and decided to plant it in the same way when he came home, and the rest followed."

"Quite true, Your Worship," the Marshal was obliged to agree.

"In these parts all the trades seem to follow that pattern, patchy, you know. One place is a Paradise, and just half a mile away it's as bare as the palm of your hand. Next to Pozdeyevka there's a place called Tumbledownovka—you won't find a single garden there, the peasants to a man are wool-workers. In summer they work on the land like all peasants, but in winter they tramp off to work up wool. Did the Governor introduce

that? No sir, he did not. An ordinary peasant, Abramko or somebody, went on business to the Kalyazinsky District and brought the craft home. You see how things are now? Cabbage, cucumbers, wool, boots, bast mats—all are brought in by ordinary people. Who do you think built the belfry in your Emptypouchovka? The Governor? Not likely. The merchant Polikarp Aggeyev Paralichev built it; the Governor came to its consecration and crammed himself with fish-pie."

"True, sir, quite true."

"And who was the first to cure herrings at Pereslavl?"

"True again. Not the Governor."

"And salmon fishing? Cloudberry picking? Rzhev and Kolomna sweetmeats? It was hardly the Governor, eh?"

"But one moment, Your Worship. There are other things besides gardening and groceries."

"For instance?"

"Well, taxes . . . collecting them and all that sort of thing."

"And what are taxes? Have you any idea?"

"Taxes. . . . Well . . . in a way they are a . . . consequence of ownership," began the Marshal, but got all muddled and had to stop.

"That's just it: consequence! Pshaw! Do you think there's anything pleasant about this consequence? Just look at the taxgatherer coming to collect the levies? How delightful! In the name of everything! If he'd come with the secret of pickled cucumbers from Murom or of smoked ham from Tambov, that would be all right! But no, it's just squeezing out taxes! Now sir, how do you think I'm to make this *consequence* materialize in the event of the Pozdeyevka cabbage crop failing? Where do I come in then? Why, I issue a circular to the chiefs of police and they raise bedlam all over the gubernia. That's all. In any case I'm put here to egg them on, but I'm hanged if I know why! The captain of police raises Cain and he doesn't know why he does it. What's all this? Where have all the government taxes gone? Whether the bad harvest has left the peasant ko-

pekless, or whether drink has got him down, whether the local money-lender has squeezed him dry, or whether the peasant is playing tricks himself, hoarding his money in a pitcher—there are so many probabilities, but what the devil do we care? No, we just bustle about, make a fuss and turn a deaf ear to everything! Pay your taxes; that's all we know!"

"Yes, that's so. They come along, make a noise, set up a bedlam, and even go looking for money under the peasants' shirts; but what they do it for—God knows!" consented the Marshal sorrowfully.

For a while they lapsed into silence.

The Marshal was the first to break it. He still had a shot in his locker, and was on the point of asking: "What about public morale? education? the arts and science?" when the Governor, apparently divining his thoughts, gave him such a look that he could only mutter something about the public food supply.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" was the point-blank rejoinder.

The Marshal blushed; earlier in the year as Chairman of the Zemstvo he had made a tour of the countryside. The recollection left him utterly confused.

"But after all, it cannot really be..." he exclaimed, and then he had a new idea: "One moment, Your Worship! There's an object for you: what about action to unite society?"

"Which society?"

"Why, this local society of ours."

"H'm. So you think I can do something to unite society?"

"Certainly! You and your wife, Madame Lukerya Ivanovna...."

"Lukerya Ivanovna perhaps, but not me. No, I humbly beg your pardon, sir. What's the use of uniting society in any case, especially ours?"

Conversation was ebbing, and in all probability would have become embarrassing were it not for the timely arrival of the cashier.

It was the thirtieth of the month, the day when in times gone by officials received their salaries. Cashiers of government offices would come to their chiefs with bulky ledgers and cash-boxes, and as the former were filled the latter became empty.

The Governor accepted the wad of bank-notes from the cashier, leisurely counted them, laid the money on the table and signed his name in the book.

"And what do you say to that, sir?" the Marshal said jokingly, nodding at the bank-notes.

"Oh.... You mean this?" murmured the Governor, as if suddenly roused from slumber.

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"Well, it's ... the reward for services!"

THE MIGHTY BOGATYR

A Mighty Bogatyr was born in a certain kingdom. His mother, Baba-Yaga, nursed and fed him and looked after him until he grew to be a giant—whereupon she herself sought the solitude of a hermit's life after sending her big son out into the world and counselling him to do great deeds!

Our Bogatyr made straight for the forest where he saw a huge oak which he tore up roots and all. He broke another in two with his fist, and climbed up a third with a hollow, and fell asleep.

The din of his snoring made all the trees in the forest creak and groan. The wild beasts ran from their lairs, the feathered birds, too, flew away, while the goblin was so scared that he grabbed his wife and baby goblins—and quit.

The fame of the Bogatyr spread throughout the whole wide world. Natives and foreigners, friends and enemies—all marvelled at his prowess. Natives feared him because they just couldn't live without fearing somebody. Besides, there was still hope: no doubt the Bogatyr had gone into the hollow with a view to becoming stronger in his sleep. "Just wait till the Bogatyr wakes up! He'll make our country famous all over the world." Foreigners, in their turn, were afraid: "D'you hear Mother Earth groaning? A Bogatyr has grown up in this kingdom. We must be careful, he might thrash us when he wakens!"

So they all walked on tiptoe, whispering: "Sleep, Bogatyr, sleep!"

A hundred years passed, then two hundred, three hundred and finally a whole thousand years. Then, at last came the day of reckoning. The donkey was to eat the carrot dangling before his nose; the four and twenty blackbirds were about to be caught and put back into the pie (they weren't caught anyway, however); the poor old peasant sweated and sweated until he could sweat no more. Good-bye, poor old bumpkin!

All the business was now done, all accounts settled: each had robbed the other clean—finis! Yet the Bogatyr still slept, his blind eyes staring from the hollow straight at the sun, sonorous snoring echoing for a hundred miles.

Long did the enemies of that land keep watch; and as they watched they thought: "It must be a mighty country where they fear a Bogatyr just because he sleeps in a hollow!"

But bit by bit they began to piece things together; they recalled the times that calamities had befallen the land and the Bogatyr had failed to deliver his suffering countrymen.

In one particular year these wretches had begun to fight one another like wild beasts; many had been killed, and all for nothing. Bitterly did the old men grieve then, and bitterly did they plead: "Come to us, Bogatyr, and settle these bloody feuds of ours!" But instead of coming the Bogatyr just slept on. There was the year when all the fields had been scorched by the

sun and the corn flattened by hail. They thought the Bogatyr would come and give bread to the people, but instead of coming he had snored away in his hollow. Then there was the year when the towns and villages had been destroyed by fire and the wretched inhabitants left without food, shelter and clothing. Now, they thought, the Bogatyr would come and alleviate the distress of his people, but this time, too, he had slept on.

To cut a long story short, the country suffered every conceivable calamity during the thousand years, and not once did the Bogatyr even open an eye or turn an ear to find out why the groans of the people echoed and re-echoed throughout the country.

What manner of Bogatyr was this, you will ask.

The land was a long-suffering land possessed of great patience, and it had a great and unquenchable faith. The people wept and lamented, and yet they believed—they believed that the moment their fountain of tears ran dry the Bogatyr would come and save them. And now the great day had arrived—but it was not quite the one they had expected. Enemies arose and beleaguered the country in which the Bogatyr lay sleeping in his hollow. And they headed straight for his oak. One of them approached it cautiously—it stank! He was joined by another, whose nostrils were also assailed. "Bah! This Bogatyr is completely rotten!" said the enemies, and they swarmed in on the country.

The enemies were cruel and merciless. They burned and destroyed everything they could lay hands on, revenging themselves for the centuries of ridiculous fear that the Bogatyr had inspired in them. The wretched people, faced with another and even greater calamity, were in a state of consternation; they rushed to meet the enemy, but alas! they had nothing to meet him with.

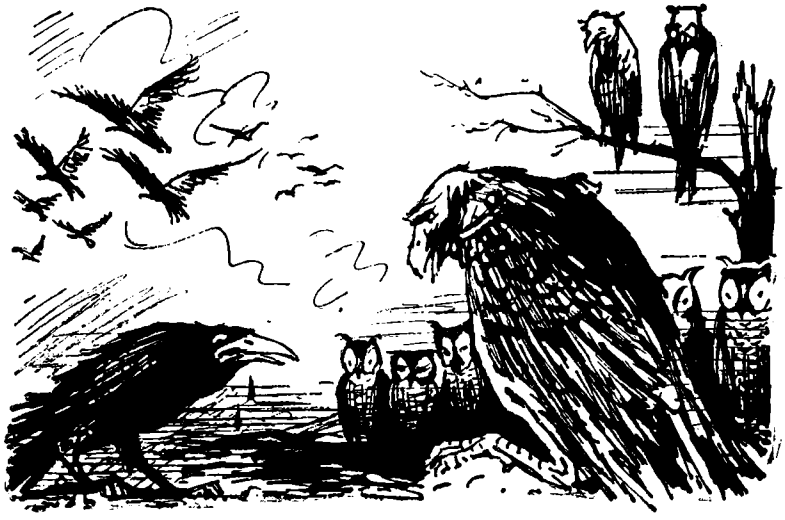
They bethought themselves about their Bogatyr, and, in one voice, clamoured:

"Hasten, Bogatyr, hasten!"

And then a miracle happened—the Bogatyr never moved! Now, as a thousand years ago, his motionless head with its unseeing eyes glared at the sun, but that mighty snoring that had made the great green forest tremble was no longer heard.

Just then Ivanushka the Fool approached the Bogatyr, shattered the oak with his fist—and lo!—they saw that vipers had eaten the Bogatyr's body right to the neck.

Sleep, Bogatyr, sleep on....



THE CROW THAT WENT IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

The old crow's heart was well-nigh eaten with pain. The crow tribe was on the way to extinction. Anyone who felt like it took a shot at them. And it wouldn't have been so bad if it were done for profit, but no—it was just for fun. The crows themselves had lost spirit; there wasn't a trace of the old ill-omened cawing; they would just settle on a birch-tree, a whole crowd of them, and, out of sheer foolishness, yell "here we are." So naturally, there would be a "Bang!" and, a dozen or two fewer in the flock. Gone, too, was the easy life and the free food of the old days. The forests had been cut down, the marshes drained, the beasts driven away, and there was not even a chance in a hundred of making an honest living. Small wonder that the crows took to nosing round farmyards and gar-

dens. This brought more bangs and another dozen or two casualties! Fortunately, crows are fast breeders, otherwise there would be none left to pay tribute to the hawk and to the kite.

The old crow tried bringing his juniors to reason: "Stop cawing when there's no need for it! Don't hang about other people's gardens!" But all he got for his pains was "A lot you know about things these days, old croaker! There's nothing to do but to thieve. Even science says: if you have nothing to eat, live by your wits! So there! Everyone lives like that these days. Nobody works—they 'trust to their wits.' Do you want us to kick the bucket? Why, we fly away long before sunrise, search the wood up and down, and find it completely bare. Not a wild berry, no carrion anywhere. Even the worms have burrowed deeper."

The old bird listened to this talk and pondered. He had had his hard times. For years the crow tribe had suffered from hunger: untold numbers had perished. And yet in those days the rule was: you've got claws—tear your own body with them, but don't covet what the other fellow has. But even then it was clear that the tribe couldn't adhere to this rule much longer. To see others in clover while you are starving—why, it was enough to give anyone heartache.

But happily, science came to the rescue. Peck up whatever and wherever you can, said philosophy. If you're lucky enough to fill your crop, then fly away free and easy. If not, then get gunshot into you and be a scarecrow in a kitchen-garden! *A la guerre comme à la guerre!*

When his old dad brought him to these parts scarcely feathered, from beyond the three-times-nine far-off seas, this was a free land—forest and stream as far as the eye could see. The forests were filled with berries and game, and the streams teemed with fish. Their chief then, as now, was the hawk; but the hawk of those days was better fed, and he was such a simple soul, so simple that to this day anecdotes are related about his

simplicity. True, Mr. Hawk did not scruple to dine off baby crows, but even in that he observed the proprieties; today he would take a fledgling from one nest, tomorrow from another, and if he saw that the nest was in a bad way, well, he just did without. Taxes were light those days; one egg per nest, one feather per wing, and a fledgling from every tenth nest as a present to the hawk. You paid your levy and having done so slept like a top.

But time passed, and the more of it went the more things changed. Man took a fancy to the free places, and the first thing he did was lay about with his axe. Forests were thinned, marshes drained, and the river became shallower. At first a few huts would spring up along the river bank, then hamlets, villages and landlords' mansions. The stroke of the axe broke the silence in the very depth of the forest, upsetting the tenor of life of beast and bird. The elders of the crow tribe foretold at the time that something evil threatened, but the younger birds just circled above the human dwellings, cawing raucously, as if welcoming the newcomers. Their young spirits rebelled against the hard rules of their seniors, they wearied of the depths of the forest. They wanted something new, unexplored, untried. The tribe broke into factions, dissenters appeared, accompanied by quarrelling and strife.

Simultaneously changes took place in the top roosts of the feathered kingdom. The old hawk was found to be incompetent. He could govern under a patriarchal system, but when relations became more complex administrative sagacity abandoned him. The heads of the administration called him the "old oaf," the crow tribe questioned his authority and shamelessly croaked all manner of rubbish into his ears. And he, instead of nipping the evil in the bud, only blinked good-naturedly and, half-jokingly, warned them: "Just wait till the reform, then you'll see what's what!" The anticipated reform came at last. The old hawk was pensioned off and a young one took

his place. To assist him, for purposes of stricter control, they appointed a falcon.

The new chiefs came and addressed stern words to the crow tribe. "I'll deal with you!" said the hawk. "So will I!" said the falcon. They thereupon announced that henceforth taxes would be trebled, issued the tax forms and flew away.

The age of ruin set in in dead earnest. The crow tribe began to grumble. "They have burdened us with cruel taxes, and we cannot pay them!"—such was the plaint that was heard all over the forest. But neither hawk nor falcon gave heed to the grumbling; they contented themselves with sending finches to catch the malcontents who suborned the people with vain words. Many a nest was rifled and many a crow taken into custody or given to the wolves and foxes. They expected the crows to take fright and bring the tribute on their tails. But the crows only flapped about wildly, cawing: "Kill us, shoot us, do what you will, we cannot give you what we haven't got!"

And so it went on. The crows were ruined but the treasury was none the richer. Whatever a lucky crow managed to pick up was snatched by the finches. In fact, things could not be worse. The crow tribe began to think in terms of migrating, and sent out scouting parties. But the scouts failed to return. Perhaps they lost the way, perhaps finches had waylaid and strangled them, or they may have died of starvation. After all, leaving one's ancestral home and going off goodness knows where is not such a simple matter. There are no more free places nowadays—man has penetrated everywhere. Even he himself hasn't enough room. He goes forward with the axe, the forests groan, the animals run helter-skelter, and from morning till night he uproots trees, clears the shrub, saws logs, shivers in dug-outs at night, cold and hungry, in anticipation of the day when all the turmoil will at last settle into order.

The old crow pondered and pondered, and at last made up his mind: he would go and declare the whole truth. But he was old and feeble; the journey was a long one, could he do it? He

must first of all bow to the hawk, then to the falcon, and lastly to the kite who ruled over the crow tribe as a governor of sorts.

Birds, like men, have strict rules of subordination. Everywhere one is asked: "Have you been to the hawk? Have you been to the falcon?" If not, you are likely to be branded as a rebel.

At last, however, he rose from his nest early one morning and flew away. Presently he saw the hawk perched on a tall pine. The hawk had fed well that morning and was cleaning his beak with his claws.

"Good morning, venerable bird," the hawk greeted him pleasantly. "What, may I ask, is your business?"

"I have come, Your Worship, to declare the truth!" cawed the old crow excitedly. "The crows are dying out... dying out. Man is killing them off, cruel taxation is ruining them, finches give them no peace. They are dying out, Your Worship, and the living have no food!"

"Is that so? And is it not due to indolence that all these ills have befallen the crow tribe?"

"You know very well that we are not indolent. From morning till night we scour the forest in quest of food. We live and labour as honest crows should, but it is now impossible to obtain anything by honest means!"

The hawk mused, as if hesitating to speak his real mind, but at last he said:

"Use your wits!"

This pronouncement did not, however, satisfy the crow, it vexed him all the more.

"I am well aware that nowadays all live on their wits, but our tribe is too simple for that. Others steal millions and get away scot free, but if a crow steals a kopek, it's death. Don't you think, it's monstrous—death for a kopek? And you say: 'use your wits.' You are our chief, you have been sent to shield us from injury, and yet you are our worst oppressor and bring

more ruin upon us than any other. How much longer do you think we shall put up with it? Why, if we. . . ."

The crow broke off, fearing his own words. To declare the truth wasn't as simple as it seemed.

But the hawk, as mentioned earlier, had had a good repast that morning, and surveyed his uninvited guest with good humour.

"I know the rest. There's no need for you to finish," he said. "We've heard it all before, and, thank God, we are still alive. . . . But you might as well make a note of this: you came here to declare the truth and tripped up at the first step. . . . Have you said all you wanted to say?"

"All for the moment," said the crow, still nervous.

"Very good, now it's my turn! This truth of yours has long been known to everyone—to finches and hawks and falcons and not only to you crows. Only it does not suit us at the moment, and no matter how loud you shout it from the house-tops nothing will come of it. When the time comes, it will declare itself, but when that time will be, nobody knows. Do you understand?"

"This much I do know—it's the end of the entire crow tribe," said the old crow bitterly.

"You haven't understood, so let's continue. You say that man destroys you, but how can we birds go against man? Man invented gunpowder. And what, I ask you, can we put against that? He invented gunpowder and shoots us; does as he pleases. We are just like the peasant—he, too, is fired at from all sides—the railway, or a new machine, or a bad harvest, or a new tax. All are aimed at him. He squirms and twists this way and that. Nobody knows how, in what way, did Lipsmack get hold of a road, while the peasant afterwards discovered that he had a piece of silver less in his purse. What can the unlearned man make of that? But it's a simple matter. Mr. Lipsmack invented gunpowder, while the peasant, like the worm, only knows how to grovel in the muck. And since you are a worm,

well then, live like a worm. Even you crows show no mercy to the worm: after all, if it raised an outcry against you, you'd be the first to be surprised: a grovelling worm, and wants to have a say! That's how things are, grandad! Might is right. Now do you understand?"

"So we've simply got to perish? What harsh words you have spoken," said the crow mournfully.

"Harsh or not doesn't matter, the point is that I haven't kept the truth from you. Not the truth that you seek, but the one which everyone must take into account in these times. However, let us get on with our talk. You say that the finches waylay and rob you of your food; that I, the hawk, plunder your nests, that instead of protecting you, we ruin you. Well, you want to eat, so do we. If you were stronger you would eat us, but since we happen to be the stronger, we eat you. That's truth, too, isn't it? You have declared your truth to me, I have declared mine to you, the only difference is that my truth is right here, on earth, while yours is way up above the clouds. Do you get me?"

"So it's death, we must die!" the old crow kept muttering, hardly able to grasp the meaning of the hawk's words, but instinctively feeling that they implied something extraordinarily cruel.

The hawk looked the suppliant over from head to tail, and, since he had fed well, thought he would have a joke.

"I've half a mind to devour you now," he said, but observing the crow's instinctive tremor, went on: "There, there now! As if I would—you're too old and bony. Undo your waistcoat a minute."

The crow spread his wings and was surprised himself: he was all skin and bone—no down, no feathers—even a hungry wolf wouldn't be tempted by a bird like that.

"There, look what a fright you are! And all because you keep thinking about the truth. If only you would live as a crow should, without thinking, you wouldn't be like that. But there—

it's time we had done! You also complain that the crows pay heavy taxes—that's Gospel truth as well. But just think—who else is there to pay them? Sparrows, tomtits, siskins and chaffinches? What can they give? Woodcock, blackcock, bustards, woodpeckers, cuckoos—these all live by themselves—you can't even find them with a candle by daylight, as the saying goes. Only the crows live in a community like regular peasants and, moreover, perpetually announce their presence. Is it any wonder that they get into the census? And once in the census, well, you've got to look out! And if taxes have been heavier of late that's because the need is greater. The greater the need, the heavier the taxation. That's the way things are, grandad. You've told the truth, I've told the truth; and as for whose truth is the stronger, well, you crows know the answer. Now be off with you, I want to sleep."

However, instead of going home, the old crow directed his flight to the falcon.

"Come what may," he thought, heavily flapping his wings, "I'll see this thing through. If the falcon won't accept my truth, I'll go to the gubernia, to the kite himself, but I will not abandon the pursuit of justice."

The falcon lived in a cave at the bottom of a gorge, and access to him was very difficult. A finch was always on duty at the entrance, receiving petitioners. At this moment the finch on duty happened to be Ivan Ivanich, the falcon's favourite, well known to all the crow tribe (rumour had it he was the falcon's illegitimate son). Ivan Ivanich, who was trusted with the most important and secret affairs, had the reputation of being a wild character; good-natured in appearance, he was obliging and even refined in manners; he was not averse to a chat and a joke, to going on the spree a bit behind the clouds, to flying at catch as catch can with the girls, the linnets, and he had been known even to do a good turn for a friend; but all this only when off duty. On duty (especially when on confidential missions) he was another creature altogether—cold, se-

vere and efficient to the point of cruelty. If he had orders to arrest anyone, he would arrest him, if ordered to strangle, he would strangle. If a bird happened to be twice as big and strong as he, he would attack it with such fury that it would scream and make off before he even touched it. In fact all the birds that ever had dealings with him quaked with fear at the mere mention of his name.

When the crow appeared, Ivan Ivanich greeted him sarcastically: "Still dreaming, old boy?"

The old crow realized that everything was already known here. Birds have their own grapevine, thanks to which not only the actions but the innermost feelings of the populace are known to them.

"What dreams can we old folk have?" he said evasively.

"Come to declare the truth, eh? Well, that's your own business. Shall I announce you?"

"If you would be so kind."

Ivan Ivanich dived into the cave where he remained about an hour. Trembling, the old crow awaited his return. At last he reappeared.

"I have been instructed to tell you," he announced, "that the chief has no time to listen to your humbug. This truth of yours has been known to everyone for ages, and in any case there is a flaw in it, if it does not reveal itself. You're a restless character and you engage in vain and dangerous talk with the people. You'd have been eaten for your doings long ago only you're so old and scraggy and feeble. You'll be going to the chief of the gubernia, I take it?"

"N-no... what's the good?" mumbled the crow, trying to back out of it.

"Don't pretend to me. I can see right through you. Very well, go, only take care they don't peck out your eyes for this truth of yours. If I were you I would think twice before going. You don't know the way even! See that cloud? It's just beyond it."

Despite the finch's prediction, the crow decided to see the

thing through. The journey was long and circuitous; he spent the night in the abandoned lairs of animals, feeding on the berries that he occasionally found on the mountain spurs. At last he cut into a cloud, and a wondrous spectacle opened before his eyes.

Several adjoining summits, covered with snow, gleamed in the rays of the rising sun. From a distance the scene resembled a fairy castle at the bottom of which lay immovable clouds, while above, for a roof, stretched the deep, endless blue of the sky.

The kite sat on a crag, surrounded by multitudes of different birds. On his right hands sat a white falcon, his assistant and counsellor; at his feet were all kinds of secretaries on special commissions: parrots, learned bullfinches and siskins; from behind him a chorus of starlings read out the morning mail; nearby, on another summit, dozed owls and bats, looking for all the world like a gubernia council; crows by the dozen flitted hither and thither with quills behind their ears, busily writing out orders, instructions, dispatches, and shouting: "Caw, caw, all hot, all hot, caw, caw, five kopeks the lot!"

The kite was a grave old centenarian, so feeble with age that he could scarcely rattle his beak. At the moment the crow descended at his feet he had just dined, and was sitting with his eyes closed in semi-slumber, his head nodding in spite of the deafening talk and noise.

However, the petitioner's arrival had started a commotion among the birds, which put a bit of life into the old kite.

"You have come with a request, venerable bird?" he asked the crow kindly.

"I have come from far-off lands, Your Excellency," the crow began in elation, "to declare the truth to you," but was at once stopped by the falcon.

"No high-falutin remarks!" he cut in coldly. "State your business without flourish, concisely and simply, point by point. What do you want?"

The crow began to outline his petition point by point: man is destroying the crow tribe; finches, hawks, falcons—all are worrying it; cruel taxation is ruining it.... And each time he made a point, the kite's beak creaked open and pronounced:

"You are right, venerable bird."

The old crow's spirit rose at this. "At last," he thought, "I shall see this 'truth' for which I have thirsted since my youth! I will serve my tribe, I will strive for it!" And the further he got with his speech, the more he warmed up. At last he had had his say and stopped.

"Have you said everything you wanted to say?" the kite asked.

"Everything."

"You have been to the hawk and to the falcon with your petition?"

"Yes."

And he briefly told the kite of his conversation with the hawk and of his unsuccessful visit to the falcon.

"Well now, here is what I wish to say to you about this truth of yours. For more than two hundred years I have sat on this cliff and at least sideways have gazed at the sun. But not once to this day have I been able to look truth in the face."

"But why?" cawed the crow protestingly.

"Because a bird cannot embrace it—it lacks the power. If anyone thinks he has grasped the truth, he must follow it, and we birds cannot follow it, that is why we just glance at it but can never afford to look it straight in the face. We glower at it and we want it to pass without touching us!"

The kite sat brooding for a moment and then went on:

"The hawk spoke harsh words to you, but he is right. Truth is good, but not at all times and not in all places is it meet to listen to it. It may lead some into temptation, to others it may seem a reproach. There are those who would like to serve truth, but how can they meet it with empty hands? Truth is not a crow, you cannot catch it by the tail! Look around you:

everywhere there is strife, everywhere discord; no one can rightly say whither he is going and why.... That is why each talks of his own particular truth. But the time will come when every living thing will clearly see the rightful limits within which life will take its course. And when that time comes the strife will end of itself, and with it will disappear like smoke all the puny personal truths. One real and all-compelling Truth will manifest itself: come it will, and the world will sparkle in its radiance. And we shall live in harmony and love. That's how things are, venerable one! Meanwhile, peace be with you, go home and tell the crow tribe that I put my trust in them as in a rock."

KRAMOLNIKOV'S MISFORTUNE

(Half-Fairy-Tale, Half-Elegy)

One morning, upon waking up, Kramolnikov[1] had the distinct feeling that he did not exist. Only yesterday he had known that he *was*; today the *being* of yesterday had been changed by some strange magic into *non-being*. But this non-being was of a particular kind. Kramolnikov hastily felt himself over, pronounced a few words aloud, and, finally, looked at the mirror. He *was* there, all of him; as a census-unit he existed in exactly the same form as yesterday.

More than that. He attempted to think—and it turned out that he could do so, just as usual. And yet, there could be no doubt that he did not exist. As if a door had banged to behind him, or the way forward were blocked—nowhere to go, no need to....

Turning from one supposition to another, and at the same time observing his surroundings with renewed interest, he

* Kramolnik—rebel.—*Tr.*

happened to look at the literary work he had started recently, which lay on the table, when suddenly his whole being felt the shock of an electric current....

Useless! Useless! Useless!

. . . . . .

"What nonsense!" was his first thought, and he took up his pen. But when he tried to go on with his work, he immediately felt that he must draw a line and write under it the word "Useless!"

Yes, all was as before, only his soul had been sealed up. Henceforth he was free to exercise all the functions proper to a census-unit, perhaps even to think, but all would be useless. He had lost his mainstay—that which had made up the sense and substance of his life; he had lost the luminous force which enabled him to light up the hearts of others with the fire that burned in his own.

He was dumbfounded; he looked and did not see; he sought and did not find. Something infinitely painful tore his spirit.... While borne in the air was the ludicrous, mocking whisper: "They've found you! They've nosed you out! They've got you!"

"What's the matter? What has happened?"

Nay, positively, his soul was sealed up.

Like all men of faith and principles, Kramolnikov had an inner shrine, which contained the treasure of his soul. He had never concealed his treasure, never regarded it as being exclusively his, but had given generously of it. In that, he felt, lay the whole meaning of his life as a human being. Without this active force, the force that induced one to shed light and good on his fellow-men and at the same time made one able to receive light and good from others, society would become a graveyard. No, it would no longer be society, but a pile of corpses.... And now the corpse period had begun for him. Interchange of the forces of light and good had come to an end. He, Kramolnikov, was a corpse himself, and all to whom he had but lately turned as to a source of living water for his

activity—they, too, were corpses.... Never had he even remotely imagined such a fearful disaster.

Kramolnikov was a true Poshekhonian* man of letters. He had no affections save for his reader, no joy but that of being in contact with him. Kramolnikov's reader did not materialize for him in any particular form, and yet he was always before him. In this devotion to an abstract personality there was a passion that was most unusual, even morbid. For years and years this passion, and it alone, had sustained him; and as the years passed it became more and more indispensable. Old age had come at last, and all life's blessings save one—the highest and most essential—had become indifferent, unneeded.

And suddenly at this moment the last blessing collapsed as well. A black abyss opened before him, engulfing that one thing which gave life its meaning.

From time to time in the literary world one meets personalities with single-track minds. From early years their lives acquire such a one-sided bent that no matter how they may be deflected from the path they are fated to traverse, the deflection is never serious or lasting. Their true vital current continues its flow under the heaps of accumulated refuse. All the variety of life seems unreal; all interest is focussed on a single luminous point. They pay no regard to life's vicissitudes, they never look ahead, nor plan defences in their rear, nor reconnoitre, nor draw any lessons from the past. This is not because they do not understand the meaning of current events and their personal dependence on them, but because no forethought and no knowledge has the power to alter by one iota the function whose cessation would be tantamount to the cessation of being. To end the function, you must kill the man.

Was it possible, then, that such murder had been perpetrated now, at this mysterious moment? What had really happened?

* Poshekhonye—a division of the Yaroslavl Gubernia, a district then notorious for backwardness, its inhabitants a byword for stupidity. Shchedrin frequently uses the name for Russia as a whole.—*Ed.*

In vain he sought an answer to these questions. He understood one thing only—that a gaping void surrounded him.

Kramolnikov was warmly and passionately devoted to his country and had a thorough knowledge both of its present and its past. But this knowledge had an unusual effect on him. It was an ever-active source of perpetual torture which eventually became the chief content of his life, directing and giving tone to all his work. He made no effort to ease his pain; on the contrary—he did everything to keep it living in his heart. The reality of this pain, and the consciousness of it being ever present, served him as a source of living images through which the pain was conveyed to others.

He knew that the country of Poshekhonye had long been notorious for inconstancy and instability, that nature herself there seemed somehow to merit only distrust. Its widespreading rivers changed their courses each year, obstructed by numerous sand-banks. Atmospheric changes struck one with their suddenness which verged on magic. Today it was hot—you could wring your shirt—while tomorrow it would stiffen like a plank on your back. Summer was brief, vegetation poor, and marshlands stretched as far as the eye could see. In a word, nature there was extremely untoward and treacherous, so that planning anything beforehand was out of the question.

Even more precarious are the destinies of man in Poshekhonye. There is no avoiding "the beggar's scrip and prison," mutters the serf; "the sum of our profits is written on the water with a pitchfork," says the peasant, while the landlord remarks: "Yesterday I had ears higher than my forehead, and today I cannot find them at all!" Man seems to be stumbling through the Vale of Chance: if God spares him, he becomes a lord, if not—he is lost.

What talk can there be of conscience when all around are perfidy and treachery? On what can conscience rest? What will nurture it?

All this was known to Kramolnikov, but, as I have said be-

fore, the knowledge only deepened the pain in his heart, and gave new impetus to his activity. I repeat, he deeply loved his country, loved its poverty, its nakedness and its unhappiness. Perhaps in future he foresaw a miracle that would stay the sorrow now consuming it.

He believed in miracles and he awaited them. Brought up in a land of magic, he, unbeknown to himself, had yielded to its charms and held it to be the decisive factor in the life of Poshekhonye. In what direction would the magic exert its force—that was the question. Besides, not all in his country's past had been gloom. Now and again the darkness had cleared a little, and in these brief intervals Poshekhonians had felt in better fettle. This fact of blossoming and feeling in better spirits in the rays of the sun, no matter how feeble they might be, is proof that light is welcome to all human beings. This craving for light must be encouraged by all means, they must be reminded that life is joy, and not everlasting torment from which death is the only relief. Not death should break his bonds, but man himself, a renovated and real man, freed from the indignities which ages of slavery have piled on him. So clearly does this truth emerge from the many definitions of human nature that it is impossible to doubt its ultimate triumph. Kramolnikov believed in its triumph, and gave himself wholly to the task of reminding others about it.

All his powers, mental and spiritual, were devoted to reviving in the souls of his fellow-men the concepts of light and truth, to fostering in their hearts the belief that light would come, and that darkness could not extinguish it. That was the sum and substance of all his activity.

And indeed the magic was not slow in asserting itself. Not the benign magic of his dreams, however, but the usual ruthless sorcery of Poshekhonye.

Useless! Useless! Useless!

To Kramolnikov's honour be it said, he never once asked himself why, what had he done to deserve this. He knew per-

fectly well that in the total absence of guilt such a question would not only be irrelevant, it would be clear evidence of weakness on the part of the questioner. He never even denied that his disaster was a matter of course—he only considered it too cruel, too painful. More than once in his long literary career, it had fallen to his lot to play the part of *anima vilis* in the hands of the magic power, but so far at least it had left his soul intact. This time, however, it had seized on that, too, crumpled it and sealed it up. And this time, familiar though he was with the whims of the magic power, Kramolnikov was appalled. His whole being seemed crushed and broken, racked with excruciating, wholly unfamiliar pain.

And suddenly, in the midst of this torture, he thought of "the reader." Till then Kramolnikov had given all his powers to the reader quite unthinkingly; now, for the first time, there stirred in him a faint hope of response, of sympathy, of assistance.

He felt an instinctive urge to go out, as if there, in the street, he would find an explanation.

The street had the usual Poshekhonian appearance. It seemed to Kramolnikov that a void extended in front of him, deaf, sightless and mute. Only the stones cried out. Men scurried to and fro in this void, casting stealthy looks about them, as if they were out to commit some robbery. And that was the one spark of life. Everything else seemed reduced to dumbness, to be in a sort of dazed stupor. And yet, his first thought was that even this dumb street might know something. He so passionately longed it to be so, that he took the cry of stones for the cry of men. However, he was not altogether mistaken. There was indeed, here and there, a conceited buzz. This was the buzzing of the liberals, his late friends. He overtook some of them, others came towards him. But alas! not a trace of sympathy could he find in their faces. On the contrary, the shadow of apostasy had fallen on them all.

"Well, my dear, they've buried you at last! Made short work of it, too!" said one of them. "A pretty sharp rap, I must say!

But after all, you know, the things you've done.... That won't do... I advised you long ago! They put up with a lot, and now, at last...."

"At last what?"

"Why, simply 'at last,' nothing more. They've had enough. Now is not the time for talking, but for looking on, and, whenever possible, for perceiving! You should have guessed that at the right moment. And if you didn't want to conform altogether, you could at least have taken it easier: find out what's inside me! But no, you just go at it straight from the shoulder. Naturally, they soon had enough. Take myself—do you think I'm happy about things? You didn't get to know me yesterday! Well, I've thought things over of late and asked lots of people for advice. I thought and I thought, and then I took the plunge!"

"Yes, friend," said another, "I'm sorry, very sorry for you. It used to be a pleasure to read your writing. One smiled and sighed, and now and again found something of value.... Even hurried to pass it on to a friend. Yes sir, you were quoted by official people, too. A friend of mine even knew a lot of your stuff by heart. But then, after all, there *are* limits. Something different is needed now, you must realize this, too, instead of waiting till they shut you up. What that *something* is, will be clear later, but at the moment.... Take me, for instance. I looked on for a while, watched what the others were doing, then went and said to my wife: 'It's time I should!' And she agreed. Then I made up my mind...."

"Made up your mind to do what?"

"Why, to follow the beaten path, that's all. No looking aside, no soaring, no thinking of world problems.... Step by step, you know. Take it easy, man. It's a bit dull, certainly, but then, we can't all be geniuses, and one must think of the family! My wife likes to dress, you know, to have amusement. And then there's one's self to think of, too, one's position, connections, acquaintances. One sees other people getting on in the world—is it fair, I ask, to lose everything? But don't imagine that I

shall be like this for ever. Oh no, I'm doing it with reservations. Times will change for the better!... For instance, if Nikolai Semyonich.... The management might change.... Today it's Ivan Mikhailich, tomorrow Nikolai Semyonich.... Then we can again...."

"But Nikolai Semyonich is a thief!"

"A thief? Ah, what expressions you use!"

At length there came a third, who simply shouted into his face: "Serves you right! Enough of your trouble-making! You compromise others as well as yourself. Why, only yesterday I had to give explanations, all on account of you, sir! And today I'm still not sure whether I'm alive or dead. What right have you got, I should like to know? 'You're on friendly terms with Mr. Kramolnikov, as I happen to know. Therefore....' 'But Your Excellency, what do you mean by friendly terms? He's just a buffoon, sir. Why not have a good laugh after a day's work?' Well, I've been given twenty-four hours for reflection.... Heaven knows what will follow! And I have a family, sir, a wife and children.... And myself—well, I'm not exactly nothing, I'm sure. Who could have imagined such a thing! Yes, sir, I repeat—what right have you? Oh dear, dear, dear!"

Kramolnikov saw no reason for continuing the conversation and went his way. But since he had to pass the house of an old schoolmate, he turned in, hoping that here at any rate he would find consolation.

The footman received him cordially, evidently he was not yet aware of what was happening. Dmitri Nikolaich was out, he said, but Aglaya Alexeyevna was in the drawing-room. Kramolnikov opened the door, but he had hardly crossed the threshold when the lady screamed and ran away. Kramolnikov retreated.

Then he remembered that an old colleague, one Yakov Ilyich Vorobushkin, lived in the Pesky district (some fifteen years before they had worked together in the Ministry of Sinister Propositions).

Vorobushkin, who had been an admirer of Kramolnikov, was not quite successful in his career. For ten years or more he had slaved as a head clerk, without the slightest hope of promotion, and at each change in the political atmosphere he had trembled for his job. Timid and lacking drive he couldn't find employment at private establishments either. From the very outset he had taken such a stand that he himself smiled at the thought of his attaining anything or of handing in memoranda suggesting reprisals and dismissals, of hanging around the reception-rooms of his superiors and so on. Once only had he sent in a memorandum on the need to encourage the weak in spirit, but his chief, after reading it, had wagged a finger at him, an act which silenced the poor fellow for ever. Lately, however, he had been nursing hopes; he went to the same church as his chief, who even made him a present once of half a communion-bread (the bottom half) and said he was very pleased. His affairs, clearly, were on the mend, when suddenly....

The door was opened to Kramolnikov by the old nurse; the frightened faces of the children peeped from behind her back. The nurse was cross—the unexpected visitor had disturbed her in the act of catching fleas. She wasted no words:

"Yakov Ilyich is out; he was summoned to the chief because of you, and whether he's living or dead we don't know. The Missus is at church."

Kramolnikov made a move to go, but had not gone far when he met Vorobushkin himself.

"Oh, Kramolnikov—you must excuse me, but I cannot continue our former relations," said Vorobushkin in a troubled voice. "This time I think I have cleared myself, but I cannot be certain. The chief said 'there is a black mark against you,' and, as you know, I have a wife and children! You must leave me, Kramolnikov! Forgive me for being so poor-spirited, but what can I do!"

. . . . . .

Kramolnikov went home depressed, in trepidation, aware that henceforth he was doomed to solitude. He was alone not because he was not appreciated by the reader who, perhaps, even loved him, but because he had lost all contact with his real reader. That reader was too far away and unable to cut the bonds that tied him. But there was left another reader, one that was near him, and who at any time could sting him with his deadly venom. *He* was left, and brazenly hinted that Kramolnikov's very dumbness was odious to him.

Dimly it passed through his mind that in all the apostasies he had witnessed, it was not individual betrayal that played the important part, but the entire oppressive order of things. That all these bold thinkers of yesterday who but recently shook hands with him so warmly, and today shunned him like the plague, were acting not merely because of mortal dread, but because they were oppressed.

They were oppressed by their own thirst for life, and since this thirst was perfectly natural and legitimate, Kramolnikov was frightened by the very thought. "Must one then," he questioned himself, "in order to maintain the right to existence, must one submit to cruel and shameful slavery? Is it that in this mysterious world only the natural runs counter to the best and most cherished aspirations of the heart?"

Or again: practically all of his recent interlocutors had justified themselves by pleading family responsibilities. One said his wife liked to dress well, the other simply said "my wife," and no more.... But the most tragic was the case of Vorobushkin. He was worried about his family. For their sake, he denied himself everything, even food and sleep, and was always on the look-out for extra work. And yet he earned so little that only the self-sacrifice of his wife enabled him to endure this poverty. And so, for this crumb, for this beggarly offering....

What is this? What is the family? How to approach this problem? How to manage so that a family should not be like the Egyptian plague to a man, should not be a millstone round his neck, preventing him from being a citizen?

Kramolnikov gave much thought to the matter, and then, all of a sudden he was jolted.

"Why," said an inner voice, "why is it that these burning questions have never been so insistent as they are now? Is it not that although you were a slave before you felt that at any rate you had some power, while now you are an impotent, dispirited slave? Why didn't you go boldly forward and sacrifice yourself? Why did you become slave to a profession which gave you position, influence, friends, instead of hastening to where you heard cries of agony? Why didn't you stand up to that agony instead of confining yourself to abstract sympathy?

"Protests flowed from your pen, but clothed in a form which made them moribund. The ills against which you protested remain exactly as they were before you protested.

"You have laboured in vain—the labour of a barrister whose tongue is hopelessly enmeshed in the web of lies. You voiced your protest, but you never said what should be done, nor did you speak about the other men who went into the fight and were destroyed, while you merely expressed your sympathy. Yours was the irritated mental reaction of a slave—kindly in intent, but futile, notwithstanding. Even those who turned away from you so brazenly today were a closed book to you. You thought that they were different yesterday from what they are today.

"True, you are incapable of doing the things they do. You are incapable of betraying those kindly yet futile thoughts which from boyhood have grown to be part of you.

"This, of course, will be counted to your credit.... Where and when? But today, with old age closing in on you, with its accompanying ills, think, what can you expect?"

Postscript

Needless to explain, all that has been said here is simply fiction. There is no such person as Kramolnikov; he has never existed; traitors and turncoats there have been at all times, not only now. And since all is well in other respects, there is nothing to make a fuss about, and the author, with a clear conscience, submits himself to the reader, begging his forgiveness.

A TALE OF THE ZEALOUS GOVERNOR WHOSE INDUSTRY CAUSED HIS SUPERIORS CONCERN

In a certain part of a certain kingdom, long, long ago, there lived a zealous Governor. In those days each Governor tried to do as much harm as possible, which, they presumed, would inevitably lead to good.

"The citizen must be fleeced," said the highlights of officialdom those days, "then flayed, and then polished off by flogging, after which, if sufficiently drilled, he'll recover his breath and prosper."

This rule our Governor notched on his nose, as they say, without effort. So that later on when (in reward for his intelli-

gence) he was appointed to an *entrusted territory,* he assumed office with his programme ready. First he would abolish science, then burn the town, and lastly terrorize the populace. And as he proceeded, he would exclaim now and then with tears in his eyes: "As God is my witness, I'm doing this harm for the citizens' good." So he would devastate the place for a couple of years, and then, no doubt, by degrees the entrusted territory would begin to turn respectable. And afterwards, having gone so far, lo and behold, it will serve as a nice camp for convicts.

Aye, a neat little convict camp—the kind of community where citizens aren't meddlesome, don't invent gunpowder, and don't write editorials, but just live in respectable clover. On week days they'd go about their business, and on Sundays pray for the health of the Governor. Thus, things would go swimmingly. They would not get any education, and yet be ready for exams any minute; they would not drink wine, yet the profits of the public houses would soar; they would not buy foreign-made goods, yet customs would come in regular. And he, their zealous Governor, would just look on and rejoice, rewarding the womenfolk with shawls and the men with red girdles. That's what his convict camp would look like! That is why he would abolish science, burn the town and cripple the townsfolk. Understand?

"Yes, sir, we understand!"

With such ambitions he arrived at his destination and began to do harm. He continued for a year, and then for another; he stopped all supplies of public provisions, abolished the health service, burned all the books and scattered their ashes to the winds. And after three years of these fruitful labours he paused in order to sum up. Good Lord! The entrusted territory should have prospered long since, but actually, it wasn't even dreaming of "becoming respectable." Just as they'd been scared to death by his awesome arrival, so did they walk about still, mouths agape and eyes staring.

The zealous Governor plunged into thought in search of the reason.

He thought and thought, and at last it struck him: *"Too much thinking*—that's the trouble!" He began hunting for precedents, and the more he recalled, the clearer it grew: although he had done quite a lot of harm, it hadn't yet come to *real harm*, to harm that would bring ruin on the whole town at once. No, that hadn't been achieved yet, and the main hitch was *thinking*. Ah dear, the times he'd start off, make the first steps, and bawl: "I'll show you!" But each time he'd be stopped by the *thought*: "Why, what a dolt you are, sir!" And then, of course, he would funk. If it weren't for that thinking of his, they'd have long been packed away into a convict camp.

"Yes, I'd make you look lively!" he would shriek, having made this discovery.

And he shook his fist at the window; perhaps, at least that would benefit the entrusted territory.

It was his great luck, however, that there was a witch in town who could tell one's fortune from tea-leaves and charm *thoughts* away, too. So straightaway he made for the witch and shouted: "Charm them away!" It being a case of urgency, the witch quickly located the hole in his head and opened the plug. Whizz! Something whizzed out of the hole—our Governor's thoughts took flight.

That, needless to say, made him glad. He began to eat and couldn't put the spoon into his mouth. That made him titter.

In a little while he rushed off to the office and stood in the middle of the room, anxious to do some harm. But alas, what harm to do and how to do it, was completely beyond him. He could do nothing but stare and gibber. And the mere sight of his thoughtlessness inspired such awe that everybody fled. Then he thumped on the table, smashed it and took to flight himself.

He came to the fields and saw people working there: ploughing, harrowing, haymaking. He was fully aware how badly they needed putting into convict camps, but how to do it—that was the rub. He glared at one of them, snatched his scythe and broke it into bits. But just as he dashed to another to break his harrow, the people took fright and in a minute the field was empty. Then he scattered a newly-made haystack and made off.

He returned to town perfectly conscious that he should set fire to it from all sides, but had no idea as to how to start. By sheer force of habit he took out a match-box, struck a match, but held it wrong side up. Then he rushed up a bell-tower and raised the alarm. He rang for an hour, he rang for two, but why he did so, he couldn't, for the life of him, understand. And the people gathered and asked: "Where is the fire?" At last he got tired of ringing, ran down, took out the match-box again, lit all the matches at once and was about to charge into the crowd when everybody ran pell-mell, leaving him alone. Then he made for home and locked himself in.

He sat for a week, he sat for two, doing no harm, simply not understanding. And the townsfolk couldn't understand either. For now, with the Governor sitting harmless, was the time for them to come to their senses. But instead, they took fright and, really, they couldn't help it. Until then only harm had been done, and good was expected to come of it any hour. But now that the long-awaited moment seemed so close at hand everything suddenly became quiet—no harm, and no good, just silence. Naturally, the people were flabbergasted. They left their jobs, hid in their cubby-holes and forgot their ABC and just sat and waited.

Meanwhile, the power of thinking began, gradually, to collect again under the plug in the Governor's head. One day he looked out the window and seemed to get a glimmer of something.

"I believe that my thoughtless appearance alone has succeeded in doing *real* harm." Then he sat down, waiting for the citizens to gather outside and beg him to set up a convict camp.

Long did he wait, but nobody came. Everything, it seemed, was in complete readiness: fields barren, rivers running low, cattle dying of anthrax, and literacy abolished. One more push and the land would be a convict camp. But the question was, who would be the convicts? All around no one was in sight, only scoundrels frolicking in gangs, like gnats in a sunbeam. And, of course, with these alone one could not set up a convict camp. To set up a convict camp one needed more than lazy stool-pigeons in it. The chaps you need are the real, hard-working, downtrodden citizens.

The Governor got cross, marched into the street, crawled into the citizens' cubby-holes, and began pulling them out one by one. He'd drag out a citizen and stun him, drag out another and do the same. But here a new problem arose. Before he could empty the last hole the citizens that had been pulled out first would be hiding again.

At this dire moment he recalled the words of his tutor, a Frenchman (of émigré stock): "If you want to let down your own country, call in the Scoundrels."

The Governor cheered up, summoned a number of Scoundrels and said:

"Get busy writing libels!"

And straightway bedlam broke out in the country. For some it brought bitter tears, but for the Scoundrels it was a real godsend. Day in and day out they frolicked and frisked, having the time of their lives. Some wrote libels, others drew up harmful projects, and another lot urged drastic remedies. "It's not bread that's needed, it's flogging!" they screamed. And all their nauseous, semi-literate gabble oozed into the study of our Governor. He read it through paper after paper, but was

none the wiser. "The primary measure to take is to beat the drums and by doing so suddenly rouse the citizens from their sleep." But why? "Citizens should be kept in continuous awe." But what for? "America must be shut down again." But *that* wasn't exactly up to him. In short, he read and smelt enough to make him sick, but couldn't give a single resolution.

Woe to the city whose Governor showers his resolutions without consideration. But it is still worse if the Governor cannot give any whatever!

Again he called in the Scoundrels and said:

"Speak up, Scoundrels! What, in your opinion, should comprise real harm?"

And the Scoundrels made this unanimous answer:

"In our opinion, no real harm can be caused till our programme is fulfilled in all its parts. And here, if you wish to know, is our programme: we, the Scoundrels, and we alone should have freedom of speech, all others should be silent; all our scoundrelly fancies should be fulfilled, the wishes of others, ignored; we, the Scoundrels, should live in clover, all others should go to the dogs; we, the Scoundrels, should be fussed with and indulged, and everyone else be cast in irons; all the damage that we, the Scoundrels, cause, should be counted as good, while everything done by others, good or bad, should be classified as harmful; no one should be allowed to say a word against us, Scoundrels, while we, the Scoundrels, should slander anyone and in any way we like. If this programme is carried out to the letter, the real harm that you need will be caused."

The zealous Governor listened to this speech, and although the Scoundrels' arrogance was not quite to his liking, he saw they were heading in the right direction, and, willy-nilly, gave his consent.

"All right," he said, "I accept your programme, sirs. I read-

ily admit that it will cause ample harm, but whether enough for our 'entrusted territory' to prosper—that remains to be seen."

And he issued orders that the Scoundrels' orations should be recorded and placed on the billboards for the public to read. After that he took up his post at the window to see what would happen. He watched for a month, he watched for two, while the Scoundrels went sneaking about, blaspheming, plundering and cutting each other's throats. But still the entrusted territory refused to prosper. Worse, the townsfolk huddled so deep in their cubby-holes that they couldn't be dragged out at all. Dead or alive—they gave no sign.

At last the Governor made up his mind. He went out through the town-gates and walked straight ahead. He walked and walked and walked, until he came to the Lord High Governor's headquarters in the Big City.

He looked around and couldn't believe his eyes. How long since had this very same city been chock-full of Scoundrels shouting out their programme at every corner, while the townsfolk hid in their cubby-holes? And now things seemed to have been turned upside down. The townsfolk walked in the streets without hindrance, and the Scoundrels were in hiding!

Wherever he turned the air was like honey and the fruits of the earth were in plenty. He entered an inn—"Ah, sir," they greeted him, "never has trade been so good!" He looked into a baker's shop: "Oh, sir, never have we sold so many rolls!" And at the grocer's, "Just think, sir, caviare—there's such demand, we can't supply enough. Our consignment is bought up in no time!"

"What is the reason?" he asked everyone and all—strangers and acquaintances alike. "What *real* harm has been done here that everything is in such fine trim?"

"Why, sir, no harm has been done at all!" they replied. "Quite

the opposite. A new High Governor has been installed and he's done away with harm altogether. That's why we are so well off!"

Thereupon the zealous Governor set out to pay his respects to the chief. The Lord High Governor's residence shone with fresh paint. The porter was new, the messengers were new, and the Lord High Governor himself was brand-new. Whereas the old one had struck the beholder as being vicious, the new one looked capable of nothing but good. The old one could only grunt; the new one sang like a nightingale. He smiled, shook hands, requested his visitor to be seated, and inquired about the state of the entrusted territory. "What's the news from there? Putting up factories and mills, eh? Cattle farming and bee-keeping up to the mark, I expect?". A real angel!

Well, there was no backing out, so our Governor began his report. And the further he got, the nastier it sounded. So, so and so; this, that and the other; no matter how much harm he had done, not a pennyworth of good had come of it. The entrusted territory simply refused to prosper, and that was all there was to it.

The new High Governor was nonplussed:

"Will you kindly repeat?"

"Thus and thus. I just cannot cause *real* harm, Your Excellency!"

"What are you talking about?"

The two men rose to their feet simultaneously and looked at each other. Suddenly the new High Governor recalled that many times he himself had reported in the same style to his predecessor.

"Ah," he laughed, "I see! But we've given that up, you know. We don't cause harm these days; we do good only. After all, *you can't pump sewage into a river and expect the water to be sweet.* Make a notch on your nose about it."

So the zealous Governor returned to his entrusted territory. And ever since his nose has borne two notches. The first (the old one) says: "Do good through evil," while the second (the new one) runs: "If you want to do good to your country...." But there was no room for the ending.

Yet now and again he mistakes one notch for the other. And then it turns out that *of sour and bitter none is the better.*